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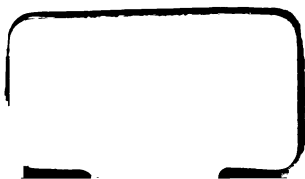
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ALL BUT LOST.



ALL BUT LOST.

A Novel.

BY

G. A. HENTY,

AUTHOR OF THE "MARCH TO MAGDALA," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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ALL BUT LOST.

CHAPTER I.

WHO WILL WIN THEM?

TEDDY DRAKE's answer to Frank's letter came by return of post, and Frank at once went up to Prescott's rooms in a state of some excitement to read him its contents. They were as follows:—

“MY DEAR FRANK,

“When I opened your letter and saw your signature I was so overwhelmed with astonishment and delight that I nearly upset the teatray, quite upset (I mean as regards temper) my respected father, who hates excitement; and the affair would probably have ended fatally, had

not the girls administered brandy in small doses. Seriously, Frank, I am truly glad to see your fist again, and still more so to hear that you will come down and see us, if invited. Please consider yourself invited hereby. We are all agreed, father, mother, and girls, that you will be received with open arms—that is by me. Fortunately, this is of all others just the time for you to come, for we are about to plunge into dissipation. My eldest sister, Margaret, is just going to be married. The event comes off on Thursday, and there are great killings of the fatted calf over the departure of the prodigal. Now a wedding in London is, I imagine, a serious, not to say heavy, business. Here it gives rise to no end of fun and excitement, and is wound up by a ball in the evening. You will be a great acquisition. Travelled swells are scarce in these parts, and as Shakespeare says, ‘homekeeping folks have ever homely wits.’ So great things will be expected of you. My people here know all about you, having heard me speak of you a thousand times. So lose no time, but put yourself into the train at twelve o’clock upon the day you receive this. I shall be at the station,

Stoke you know, at half-past five to meet you ; so let there be no mistake about it. Shake old Prescott by the hand for me.—Yours very truly,

“TEDDY DRAKE.

Prescott laughed over the letter.

“I suppose you mean to go, Frank ?”

“Of course,” Frank said. “This is quite an excitement. A country wedding will be a relief indeed after these solemn London parties. Well, I have no time to lose, and must go and get gloves and things for the festive occasion. Keep your eye on Buttons, Prescott, and make him useful.”

It was nearly six o'clock, and already dark, when Frank arrived at the dingy little station of Stoke-on-Trent. Teddy Drake was upon the platform to meet him, and was perfectly uproarious in his greeting.

“My dear Frank, I am glad to see you.”

“And so am I to see you, Drake, very glad. You are not a bit altered.”

“You are, Frank, tremendously. I should hardly have known you with those big whiskers.

Is that portmanteau all you have ? That is right. Here, porter, just put this portmanteau in my dog-cart."

"This Trent valley of yours, Drake, is rather alarming to a weak-minded man. All these flaming forges and kilns certainly give one the idea that the crust of the earth must be of unusual thinness hereabouts, and the hot regions unpleasantly near. I do not feel singed yet, certainly, still one can't but think that *facilis descensus averni*. The question is, 'shall I hence unscathed go ?' "

Teddy laughed.

"To another man I should have said that the bright eyes of the Staffordshire girls were more dangerous than their fathers' fires ; but you, who have seen the beauties of Spain, Italy, and the East, are not likely to be scorched by our lesser luminaries."

"You see more pretty faces in a week in England than in a year abroad, Teddy. How far is your place ?"

"Only another hundred yards or so. There, you can see the lights among the trees. Now, we are turning in at the gate. Mind your face,

Frank: some of these shrubs want cutting. Here we are."

The front-door was opened as the dog-cart drove up, and the bright light streamed cheerfully out into the damp evening. Mr. Drake was in the hall.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Maynard. We have heard so much of you from Teddy that we all feel as if you were quite an old friend."

"Come along, Frank; I will show you your room. Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes, so you had better go up at once, and then I can introduce you to the womankind."

The room was a small one, for which Teddy apologised.

"You must put up with a small room, Frank, for to-morrow we shall have no end of people here,—bridesmaids and aunts, and that sort of thing."

"You need not apologise, Teddy. After knocking about Europe and the East for the last two years I am not likely to quarrel with such a room as this. Now, you go off and dress while I am unpacking, and come in again as soon as you can, and talk to me."

Teddy was not long absent.

"Now, Teddy, sit down while I am dressing, and tell me about every one; give me the *consigne*, as it were."

"The present occupants of the house," Teddy Drake said, "are, first, my father, whom you have seen—a dacent man, though I say it myself—acting partner in the great house of Painter & Co., porcelain manufacturers; an Englishman, quiet and matter of fact; has not a keen appreciation of a joke. My mother is Irish to the backbone, and we all take after her. Indeed, we spend a good deal of our time over there with her relations, and the brogue comes natural to us. I always use it myself, especially when I am talking with ladies; one can venture upon a tinder sentiment in the brogue which one could never hazard in Saxon. The only son of the above-mentioned couple——"

"Spare me that, Teddy," Frank laughed; "I know more of him than is to his advantage already."

"Now I call that unkind, Frank; I was about to have said some neat things about Edward Drake, Esq. My elder sister Margaret is to be

married in two days, so you won't see much of her, and I need not bother you with a description. She is quiet, and takes after her father. Sarah is one of the jolliest girls you will meet in a day's journey, and Katie's a darling."

"I remember your speaking of your two elder sisters at Cambridge, Teddy, but I do not think I heard you mention the youngest."

"Oh, Katie is not a sister at all, Frank. She is a cousin—a downright Irish girl. She has lost her father and mother, and has been living with us for the last two years. Now, Frank, make haste with your dressing, and draw it as mild as you conveniently can, for the girls' sake. It is not fair, Frank; upon my life, it is not. I told them that you were really a good fellow, and they are prepared to like you upon my recommendation; but I said that, as far as looks went, you were nothing to speak of—in fact, rather the contrary—and now they'll think I've been humbugging them entirely."

"I am very much obliged to you for your recommendation, Teddy," Frank said, laughing.

"It's as true as the piper, Frank. You know you were not a bit good-looking—too thin and

whipcordy; but now you have got so much broader, and those whiskers of yours alter your face altogether. Do you know, Frank," Teddy said, critically, "you are really an uncommonly good-looking fellow."

"Have you got any boxing-gloves in the house, Teddy?" Frank asked, laughing; "because, if so, we will put them on after breakfast to-morrow."

"No, thank you, Frank, I know you of old; and at any rate no boxing for me till after the wedding. There, now you are ready; let's go downstairs. Dinner will be ready in three or four minutes."

As Frank Maynard crossed the drawing-room, he came to the rapid conclusion that Teddy's sister Sarah was a tall, handsome girl, with good features, and a happy, good-natured expression like that of her brother. Katie was short and rather plump, with large eyes, which Frank noticed, with amusement, opened a little wider in surprise as he entered. Teddy had evidently drawn his portrait in most unflattering colours, for the introduction over, Sarah's first remark was,—

"I should not have known you in the least, Mr. Maynard, by Teddy's description. You are not one bit like it; is he, Katie?"

"No," Katie said; "not in one bit. Teddy, what did you take us in that way at all for?"

"'Pon my life, Katie, it's as true as could be. It's the whiskers have made the difference to him."

"Nonsense, Teddy. Don't believe him, Miss Drake; he has been making fun of you on purpose. Teddy was always great at romancing."

"Don't you mind what these young people say, Mr. Maynard; they are very rude," Mrs. Drake said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Drake, I am pretty well able to take care of myself, and I know Teddy of old."

When they were fairly seated at dinner, Frank had time to examine his new acquaintances more accurately. Miss Drake was something like her sister Sarah in appearance, but was more quiet and subdued. Sarah, he thought, was really very pretty, and seemed as full of spirits and fun as her brother. Kate O'Byrne was, as has been

said, short and rather plump. Her hair was jet black, and her head set gracefully on to her neck. Her features were not particularly good, but her eyes were beautiful; large eyes of uncertain colour, now hazel, now grey, generally very soft and trusting in their expression, but frequently lighting up with an arch ripple of fun, and when indignant flashing out defiantly; eyes which in repose, shaded by the long black eyelashes, were soft and thoughtful, but which looked up so earnestly and straight for an answer, that he would have been a bold man who would have ventured upon an untruth to their owner. A soft, plump cheek, lips slightly parted, a pretty chin with a little double roll beneath it, a soft and very musical voice, a very small, well-shaped hand, and, as Frank afterwards noticed, tiny feet. Katie O'Byrne was not nearly so pretty, so far as prettiness went, as her cousin Sarah: hers was one of those faces which do not strike greatly at first sight, but grow gradually upon one. A face with a good deal of character and firmness; altogether, as Frank said to himself at the end of the evening, "a very loveable face."

The conversation at dinner was sustained with

unflagging spirit, principally by Frank, Teddy Drake, and his sister Sarah. Miss O'Byrne did not talk much, and indeed, Frank found afterwards that she seldom took much share in general conversation.

Frank did not sit long over his wine, but soon joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and was speedily engaged in an animated skirmish with the two girls. Then they had some music, and Miss O'Byrne sang some Irish melodies in a pure, rich, contralto voice, which had been thoroughly trained, and with a feeling and expression which delighted Frank. The ladies retired early, as the next was to be a fatiguing day, and Frank and Teddy sat up smoking and talking of college days, until a very late hour indeed.

The next day the house filled with guests, and great were the preparations for the event of the day following. Frank and Teddy were in great request, and found full occupation in assisting the bridesmaids to fill the vases, &c., with flowers. Furniture, too, had to be moved, and many arrangements improvised, for the ball in the evening. Very gay was the wedding, and the whole town of Stoke made

holiday. The wedding festivities were followed by much general gaiety,—dinner, small dances, and balls. The Drakes' house continued full of guests, and Frank had great opportunities in the midst of all these gaieties to indulge in a very extensive amount of flirtation. After his long absence on the Continent, there was a great charm in the unrestrained and familiar intercourse with a number of young English girls as lively, innocent, and fearless as young fawns. But if he flirted, he flirted generally, dividing his attentions with perfect impartiality among the bridesmaids, and, with the assistance of Teddy Drake, keeping up a perpetual state of fun and laughter with them. Miss Drake and himself were great allies. After the first few days they had, by mutual consent, taken to call each other Frank and Sarah. With her cousin Frank never attempted a similar step, but addressed her as Miss O'Byrne, in a formal manner, and took excessive pleasure in teasing her in that and other small matters, especially in respect of her brogue, to her no small indignation. For Katie was a staid little person in her way, and stood rather on her dignity, and she

chafed not a little under the feeling that even when Frank was professing the utmost deference to her opinion, he was really quietly bantering her. One evening, when Frank had been there nearly three weeks, and was talking of leaving in a few days, he had been specially teasing. Katie had fought hard as usual, but had been conscious of being worsted, and when she went upstairs for the night, she said to her cousin,—

“I am really glad Mr. Maynard is going, Sarah. I begin almost to hate him.”

Sarah opened her eyes in astonishment.

“What nonsense, Katie. You don’t mean it? Why I do think he is the very nicest fellow I ever met.”

“Yes, I suppose so, Sarah; and his opinion of you seems to be equally good.”

“I hope so,” Sarah said; “one always wishes to be liked by people as one likes them.”

“Stuff, Sarah! My opinion is,” Katie said, positively, “that we shall have another wedding here one of these days.”

“Perhaps so, Katie,” Sarah answered composedly; “but I do not think we should name the same person if we were to guess.”

"Well, Sarah, I will bet you half-a-dozen pairs of kid gloves upon it."

"Very well, Katie, I bet. Now who do you name?"

"Frank Maynard and you, of course."

"That's your idea, Katie, is it?" Sarah said, provokingly cool.

"Yes, it is, Sarah," Katie said, sturdily. "Now, Sarah, you don't think you can deceive me. Never mind, dear, though he does make me mad with him, he's a very good fellow, and you have my full consent and approval."

"Thank you, dear—wait till you're asked."

"It won't be so very long, Sarah."

"Yes, it will, Katie. Frank and I are the best friends in the world, but if he were stopping here for the next ten years we should never be anything more."

"Now, Sarah, you name your couple. It must be one of the bridesmaids you know, or at any rate, some one down here."

"It is one of the bridesmaids," Sarah said quietly.

"Well, which?" Katie said, impatiently.

"Katie O'Byrne."

A flush of colour came into Katie's face, and she said, indignantly,—

“Sarah, you're making fun of me!”

“No, I am not, my dear. That's the couple I name for six pair of kid gloves against the other.”

“Ah, well,” Katie said, “then if what you say about yourself is true, our bet will never be decided. He dislikes me, I'm sure of it, and certainly I dislike him. Why, he's always making fun of me. He never even says a civil word to me, and I'm sure I don't want him to.”

“My dear Katie, I don't say the affair is coming off at once. I don't even say that I believe, or rather that I have any reason to believe, that Frank is in love with you. I only say, as you challenged me to fix on one of the bridesmaids, I fix upon you. He makes no distinction between the others; he flirts with them miscellaneously. You are the only exception. He certainly does take pleasure in teasing you, and in making you indignant, but that shows at least that he thinks you worth the trouble of teasing. He almost always manages to get next to you

out walking and at meals, quite accidentally, Katie, or else wonderfully well managed."

"Nonsense, Sarah; I never remarked it."

"Very well, Katie; but it is so for all that."

Her cousin thought a little, and then said,—

"Well, if he does, Sarah, it is only because he sees I would rather he didn't, and wants to bother me. No, no; you may not have to pay your gloves, but you will never win mine. I never heard a more ridiculous idea in my life."

"Well, Katie, we shall see," Sarah said.

"Now I must be off to bed."

The next day they were out in the garden, looking for violets, for it was now the end of March. Frank and Miss O'Bryne were a little apart from the others, and he had just made an attack upon Ireland. The girl turned round upon him, suddenly,—

"Why do you always treat me like a spoilt child, Mr. Maynard? Why are you always teasing me and making me mad?"

"Not always, I hope, Miss O'Byrne?" Frank said, seriously.

"Yes, you are," Katie said, indignantly; "you are laughing at me now. Why do you do it?"

"Do you really wish me to tell you, Miss O'Byrne?"

"Oh, I suppose you are going to invent some ridiculous compliment, but I won't believe it, Mr. Maynard."

"Are you quite sure, Miss O'Byrne?"

"Sure and sure," Katie said, resolutely.

"Well, I shall try to convince you," Frank said. "Do you like the sea?"

"I don't see what that has to do with the question, Mr. Maynard. But, yes, I do like it—I love it dearly."

"So do I, Miss O'Byrne. Are you a good sailor?"

"Oh, yes," Katie said; "I always lived near the sea, and used to go out in yachts. Yes, I am a very good sailor."

"Then, of course, you enjoy rough weather, Miss O'Byrne? I like, above all things, to see a storm."

"So do I," she said, enthusiastically. "I love being out when it is really rough."

"I suppose, then, you will agree with me, Miss O'Byrne, that no one who does not really love the sea could enjoy a gale."

Katie thought the proposition over for a second.

"No, I suppose not," she said. "But I really don't see that this has anything to do with what I asked you—why are you always teasing me?"

"I have been answering your question the whole time, Miss O'Byrne. You have only to suppose you are the sea."

The girl thought a moment, and then looked up indignantly, with a heightened colour, as she saw the application.

"What nonsense you talk, Mr. Maynard. You will try to persuade me next that to knock a person down is a sign of friendship. I shall never believe you again," she said, as she turned to join the others.

"Yes you will, some day, Katie," Frank said, following her closely.

Miss O'Byrne did not appear to have heard, but she had. It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name, and it sounded strangely to her from his lips. Katie could not help colouring, and was angry with herself for doing so, and still more angry when she saw

by a little quiet smile on Sarah's face that she noticed it. When she thought the matter over, she determined, on the first opportunity to tell Mr. Maynard she considered it to be a great liberty. But then she felt certain Frank would only laugh and say that he called her cousin "Sarah," but that if Miss O'Byrne objected, he would apologise, and not repeat the offence. After all, too, there was no particular reason why she should object any more than Sarah. As to that talk about the sea, it was absurd.

"No one would care for a storm unless he loved the sea," Katie said, thoughtfully; "and of course he meant me to suppose that he would not have cared about making me mad if he didn't—well, like me. What humbugs men are," she exclaimed, indignantly; "I do think they imagine we girls are fools enough to believe any stuff they like to tell us."

Frank Maynard did not repeat the offence of calling her by her Christian name until he said good-bye to her upon leaving.

"What impudence!" Katie said to herself, as she looked after the dog-cart; "what impudence,

to venture to squeeze my hand, as he certainly did, just as if he would persuade me that all his rudeness is to go for nothing. Well, men are humbugs! I wonder whether he will ever come back again."

CHAPTER II.

THE "LIVELY STUNNERS."

AFTER the first greeting between Frank Maynard and his friend Prescott, upon the former's return from Staffordshire, and when they had fairly sat down in Frank's room for a talk, Prescott said,—

"Now, Frank, let me hear all about what you have been doing. Your letters were not long, and you seemed enjoying yourself down there, Frank. I suppose Teddy is just about the same as he used to be."

"Just the same," Frank laughed; "he pretends to assist his father in the business, but I fancy the material advantage, derived by Painter and Co. from Teddy's services, is slight indeed. He went round the manufactory with me, and I find that his knowledge upon the subject of china is absolutely nil. I ques-

tion if he would know the difference between Dresden and Sèvres, or between Limoges and Etruscan; and I should imagine his ideas on the subject of accounts, are, if possible, even more vague. No, he is just what he used to be—a careless, warm-hearted Irishman, and the best fellow in the world.”

“But Mr. Drake is not Irish, Frank?”

“Not the least in the world. A particularly practical, long-headed, sensible Englishman. His Celtic blood all comes from his mother. She is as Irish in her way as he is in his, and so is his sister.”

“Is Miss Drake pretty, Frank?”

“Yes,” Frank said, “very pretty; an awfully jolly girl, Prescott, not the least bit of nonsense about her—downright and straightforward, you know.”

Prescott glanced up. But he saw that Frank was too outspoken in his praise to be the least in love.

“Tall or short, Frank?”

“Tall,” Frank said; “a good deal like Teddy; fancy Teddy a pretty girl, and you’ve got Sarah.”

“And there was a cousin with an Irish name,

Frank, wasn't there? You mentioned her in your first letter, but you did not allude to her afterwards. What was she like?"

Frank was longer in giving his answer this time.

"Well," he said, slowly, "Miss O'Byrne would hardly be considered very pretty, at least I don't think most people would call her so. No, I should say not. She was rather short; and, yes, I should say, and plump."

Prescott glanced across again at Frank, and a little amused smile came across his face at the cautious way in which he had spoken. But Frank was looking thoughtfully into the fire, and did not notice it.

"There were other young ladies staying in the house you said, Frank. Was there anything special about any of them?"

"No," Frank said, carelessly; "they were a very jolly lot of girls; I had great fun down there."

"Lots of dancing, and music, and so on, I suppose, Frank?"

"No end," Frank said.

"Any of the girls sing well?"

"Katie sang splendidly; one of the finest

voices I ever heard in my life," Frank said, enthusiastically."

"Katie?" Prescott repeated questioningly.

"Miss O'Byrne," Frank explained.

"Ah," Prescott said, with a smile, "the stout little cousin."

"Good heavens, Prescott," Frank said, turning round with great indignation, "what are you talking about?—stout little—by Jove, what put such a ridiculous idea in your head?"

"Why, my dear Frank, you said she was rather short and plump."

"Pooh, nonsense," Frank said; "she is rather short, perhaps, but has a charming little figure; just a little plump; but—" and muttering the obnoxious word over to himself, he smoked away in short angry puffs.

Prescott could hardly help laughing aloud at the success which attended his ruse.

"So Miss O'Byrne is not to be talked of lightly, eh, Frank?"

"Oh, nonsense," Frank said. "Of course one doesn't like to hear a girl like Katie talked of as a stout little—but there, of course you couldn't tell."

"And do you ever mean to repeat your visit, Frank?"

"Well, yes, Prescott, I expect I shall go down there again; at least I hope so."

"And may I ask, Frank, if you have any intention of bringing Miss O'Byrne back with you?"

Frank put his pipe down, and looked at Prescott, who was evidently greatly amused; then, after a moment's pause, he said,—

"You have guessed it, Prescott, sure enough. If Katie will come, I will bring her up."

"Really, Frank?"

"Really, old man. I should have told you sooner or later. I am quite in earnest. I will marry Katie O'Byrne if she will have me."

"I am very glad, Frank, very glad indeed;" and Prescott shook his friend warmly by the hand. "I always hoped you would do it sooner or later, Frank. You are only leading an idle useless life, and a wife will be the making of you. Of course she is very nice, Frank."

"My dear fellow," Frank said, quite inclined to be communicative now that the ice was

broken, "she is the most loveable girl in the world."

Prescott laughed.

"But not pretty, eh, Frank?"

"Well, Prescott, I suppose most men wouldn't call her pretty at first; I don't think I did; but I think her so now. Not pretty, perhaps, but loveable; that's the only word that expresses it, Prescott; just loveable, with the most trusting eyes you ever saw. She is full of fun, Katie, and has got a very decided will of her own. Not a bit of a muff, you know, Prescott."

"No, I don't think you would be likely to fall in love with a muff, Frank. Well, and what does the young lady think of you, Frank? Was it a very strong flirtation?"

Frank laughed.

"No, Prescott, not a bit of it. It was perpetual war. I am afraid I was very hard on her, but I did like teasing her, and making her indignant. Katie has rather a will of her own, you see, and can hit very hard when she likes; and she was immensely angry at being made fun of. I do think, sometimes, she almost hated me. I don't think she has the least idea I care for

her ; but I don't know, Prescott, I hope that in the end I shall win her."

Prescott smiled at Frank's description of his love-making.

"Well, Frank, and what do you propose doing with yourself this evening?"

"I hardly know, Prescott. I feel too restless to sit still, and a theatre would be just as bad. What with drives, and dinners, and parties, and a constant state of light skirmishing when I was with Katie, and an extreme amount of thought and restlessness when I was alone, I have been kept in a state of constant excitement for the last three weeks. I was always wondering whether anything would come of it; whether it was a mere case of strong flirtation, such as I have been engaged in fifty times before, or whether I was seriously in earnest. And then at last I arrived at the fixed and settled determination that of all the women I ever met, Katie was the one most certain to make me perfectly happy. Altogether I have been regularly worked up, and it would be quite impossible for me to sit still. I want something to let off the steam. A row would suit me admirably. It

would be an immense satisfaction to hit out from the shoulder. Suppose we go to the 'Stunners.' There is sure to be some sparring going on; and if there's no one else, I can put on the gloves with Perkins. What do you say, Prescott?"

"Anything you like, Frank, so that I am not called upon to bail you out."

So after dinner they went up to the "Lively Stunners." The "Stunners" was a public-house, situated in one of the small streets lying above the top of the Haymarket. Not an aristocratic neighbourhood, indeed the reverse; but the "Stunners" did a good business, as even Perkins was ready to allow. Perkins was behind the bar in his shirt-sleeves, and was very busy indeed when the young men entered.

"Ah, Mr. Maynard, I am glad to see you, sir."

"How are you, Perkins? Anything going on upstairs?"

"Not much, sir. It's not the night for sparring. We've got harmony to-night, sir."

"I want a set-to with the gloves, Perkins. What do you say?"

"Well, sir, I should be willing enough, but I

am going out for a spree. Just the thing to suit you if you are in the humour."

"What is it, Perkins?"

"Well, sir, you must keep it dark, or it wouldn't do me any good in my business; but the Slogger and I are going,"—and here he bent over the bar with an air of great mystery,—
"we're going to a Chartist meeting to-night. The Slogger knows a fellow who is hot about it, and he's put him up to the pass-word. So we're going, and if you and Mr. Prescott are game, you can go with us. We can easily get up a row if we like, and it's hard if us four can't fight our way out of it."

"The very thing, Perkins; as you say, it's hard if we can't get up a row somehow. What do you say, Prescott?"

"Anything you like, Frank. A black eye will not look strictly professional, but as I have no case on in court it won't much matter. I have not used my fists since that last town and gown row we were in together at Cambridge; and I have no objection to a row for once in a way."

"Well, Mr. Maynard, we are not to start till half-past nine, it's no use getting there too early,

so if you don't mind going upstairs for an hour, I will tell you when it is time to be off."

"If there's no sparring going on, Perkins, I think we'll go out for a stroll, and come back at the time you name. I can't stand the bad tobacco smoke, and the bad singing."

"Now, gentlemen, if you're ready," Perkins said, when they returned, "I'm with you."

They went into the bar-parlour, where the Slogger, a powerful man, with the unmistakeable look of a prize fighter, was awaiting them.

"You are not thinking of going like that?" he asked. "Lor', they'd never let you in, not if you'd twenty pass-words, and if they did, they'd pitch into us directly we were in the light. No; if you mean to go, you must go like working men."

"Have you any clothes you could lend us, Perkins?"

"Well, sir, I've an old greatcoat which would cover you well enough, and I dare say I can rummage out something for Mr. Prescott. As for hats, your best way is to send out and buy a couple of cheap billycocks. You can pull them down over your eyes. I think that with that, and

if you take off your collars, and put a black handkerchief or a bird's eye round your necks, you will pass well enough."

The transformation was soon effected, and the two young men could not help laughing at each other's altered appearance.

"You'll pass very well for a bricklayer out of employ, Frank."

"Well, Prescott," Frank retorted, "I could swear to you as a disreputable-looking tailor anywhere."

A cab was at the door, and the party were soon off.

"Now," Perkins said, "if there is a shindy, we must all keep together, and then we shall be as right as ninepence, whatever comes of it. I'd back the Slogger and you and I, Mr. Maynard, to clear the roughs out of any room in London in about five minutes. Mr. Prescott's very handy with the gloves, but he hasn't weight, and in a close fight weight tells."

"Where is the place, Perkins?"

"In the New Cut, sir. It's a penny gaff at ordinary times."

Arrived at the New Cut, they discharged the

cab, and went on foot through the busy crowd with which that locality is always filled of a Saturday evening. Hundreds of men were standing about, their week's work finished, smoking and talking together. The women were busy shopping, and were engaged in examining the various goods before purchasing, and in chaffering with the shopmen and costermongers. The pleasure of shopping is by no means a monopoly of the rich, the poor enjoy it to at least an equal extent; and no lady can more carefully examine the texture of the silk dress which the shopman temptingly holds out before her, or turn over one article after another before making her selection, than does her poorer sister scrutinise the markings and colour of a piece of bacon, or turn over the heaps of cauliflowers and cabbages upon a costermonger's cart. Great is the noise. The touts at the second-hand furniture and Jew clothing shops, the butchers, and the itinerant vendors, vie with each other in their efforts to obtain customers. Half-price has just begun at the Victoria Theatre, which stands large and black at the corner of the New Cut, and numbers are flocking in to see the

tragedy of "The Hangman's Stepdaughter; or the Murdered Mother of the Blind Alley." Views of this drama, of thrilling interest and in bright colours, are placed beside the doors, and, illuminated by the bright gaslight, exhibit scenes of bloodshed and murder, highly enticing to the frequenters of the threepenny gallery. A few policemen are scattered among the crowd, but their services are seldom required, except when some drunken man insists upon fighting everyone, and, refusing all persuasion to return home, has to be taken to the station-house, in spite of his struggles and shouts, by two policemen. In the discharge of this duty, although undertaken solely for the protection of the public, the police are greeted with much jeering and hooting on the part of that ungrateful body. And then all goes on quietly for a time. The gaslights shine brightly out from the gin-palaces, and great business is in course of being there carried on. Numbers go in and out, and the glass-doors are ever on the swing. Through these doors glimpses can be caught of crowds of men and women standing at the bar drinking, and waiting to be served; while through the open

windows of the room above sounds of singing and of violent thumping of pewter pots and glasses upon the table come out. Through all this the four companions slowly made their way, and presently stopped at the door of one of those establishments popularly known as a penny gaff,—theatres at which a suicide, three murders, four combats, two comic songs, and a ballet, are condensed into the space of a quarter of an hour, and are to be heard for the charge of a penny; dens in which a perspiring audience inhale a pestilential atmosphere and vicious ideas together, and which the strong arm of the legislature should either reform or sweep away altogether.

At present the establishment was apparently closed. The appalling pictures no longer stood before the doors. The illumination which usually blazed upon it was extinguished. No sound of music or laughter came through into the street. The doors were closed, and the whole place seemed deserted. Now and then, however, a man went up, knocked, and after a short parley was admitted, and then all was quiet again. At this door the party knocked. It was partially opened, and a voice said,—

"What do you want?"

"Universal suffrage," the Slogger answered.

The door opened a little wider, and they all entered. They found themselves in perfect darkness, but the man who had let them in turned on the light of a bull's-eye lantern.

"You are late, mates," he said, leading the way along the passage.

Opening a door, he admitted them into the main apartment, a sort of covered room or theatre. At one end was a raised stage, with the usual front and drop scene. The latter was now raised, however, and four or five chairs and a table were on the stage, and some ten or a dozen men were standing or sitting there. The aspect of the place was tawdry and dirty beyond description. The walls, originally white and decorated with flower wreaths, were now black with smoke and filth. What the ornamentation of the ceiling had once been, it was impossible to say. The place was lighted by two gas chandeliers, without glasses, and by a row of footlights in front of the stage. The room was full of men, who were mostly smoking short pipes, and the fog of tobacco smoke made it seem dingier and darker than it

really was, while the close, noxious atmosphere, and the entire absence of any ventilation whatever, rendered it difficult for any one unaccustomed to such noxious atmosphere to breathe at all.

The new comers took their stand close to the door where they entered, and the seats having been removed and everyone standing, their coming was altogether unnoticed by anyone.

"I say, Prescott, the air here is poisonous; it makes me feel quite faint."

"So it does me, Frank. We'd better light our pipes; we shan't feel it so much."

They accordingly followed the example of all around them, and began to smoke, but even then they found the atmosphere almost overpowering.

"We can't stand this long, Prescott. We'll just listen to a speech or two, and then we will have some fun."

The meeting, they soon found, was principally held for the object of informing the people of the arrangements which had been made for the great meeting to take place in a few days. All in the hall were evidently in their way leaders, and the speakers urged them to bring up their forces to the appointed place, to keep them well in hand,

and to be prepared in case of resistance, for barricade fighting. Each was requested to notice particularly the addresses of the gunsmiths' shops, and even of second-hand dealers where a few firearms might be exhibited in the windows, and to tell off men upon whom they could rely to seize the arms. General instructions, too, were given as to forming barricades; and the noble example of the French was cited to them again and again.

"This is rather a serious business, Frank."

"It's all talk, my dear fellow; an English mob has no idea of street fighting; a few hundred policemen would drive ten thousand of them."

The speaker now finished amid a low murmur of applause. The man who followed him was of a less practical turn, and simply strove to excite his hearers by a speech calling upon them to strike for liberty, and to cut off the chains in which they were bound by a pampered aristocracy.

"Look out, Perkins, I'm going to begin," Frank said; and then, at the top of his voice, he shouted out, "That's a lie!"

An immense confusion at once took place in the hall. There were shouts of "A spy!"—"Turn him out!"—"Hang him!"—"Lock the doors!" But those nearest who turned to carry these threats into execution, hesitated a moment at the sight of the three powerful men who guarded the door, which Prescott, as previously agreed, had opened, to prevent the man in the passage locking it on the other side. The hesitation was momentary, and then a tremendous rush was made by the exasperated crowd. Those in front, however, as speedily recoiled, or were beaten back by the tremendous blows of Frank Maynard and the two prizefighters. The assault of the Slogger, however, was not in the first place directed against those who attacked him, but against a man who was standing in front of him, and who had evinced no intention of taking part in the fray. He was a tall man, dressed as a bricklayer, with large whiskers and black hair. Soon after he had entered, the Slogger had noticed with surprise that these whiskers were false, for the upper part of one of them, owing probably to the heat of the room, had become detached from his face. The

Slogger would not have thought much of this, as he supposed at first it was some one who had disguised himself, and come merely from curiosity, as he had himself, but something in the man's figure, and in his peculiar way of holding his head, reminded him of a man against whom he had a particular grudge, for having, only the week before, been the means of transporting the Slogger's brother. He determined immediately the fray began to find out if his suspicions were correct. Accordingly, the instant the rush was made, he commenced the assault, by striking the unsuspecting man in front of him a violent blow on the ear, which would have sent him to the ground had not he been kept on his feet by the crowd around him. His false whiskers, however, fell off, and the smoothly shaven cheeks were visible.

"Ha! Mr. Barton," the Slogger shouted, as he dealt tremendous blows right and left at the assailants who rushed at him, "it's my turn now. You shan't go out from here with a whole skin. A spy!—a spy!" he shouted; but the tumult was too great for his voice to be heard. For some little time the three men had easily

beaten off their assailants, but matters were momentarily becoming more serious. The men on the platform were breaking up the chairs and tables, while others tore down portions of the woodwork to form weapons. These now pressed forward through the crowd as they fell back in dismay from their formidable opponents.

"I think it's about time to make a bolt, sir."

"All right, Perkins,—come along."

In the meantime, Prescott had had a quiet encounter of his own with the door-keeper—who had been signally worsted, and had run out into the street—and was now holding the door ready to close it as the others retreated. After a rush upon the assailants, in order to drive them back, and gain time for the manœuvre, the three men made a hasty retreat through the door, which Prescott instantly closed and locked behind them, and in another instant they were out in the New Cut.

"Come the other way, sir," Perkins said, "there's a cab-stand under the railway-arch, and if them fellows get out and find us, they'd be as likely to knife us as not."

In another minute they were in the cab.

"That was a sharp fight, Perkins."

"And no mistake, sir. As good a turn-up as I've had for a long time. There'll be some smartish black eyes in the morning."

"Do you think there is really going to be a row with these Chartists, Perkins?"

"I don't think so, sir. They don't mind the bobbies, but they'll never stand against the red coats. I'm going to-morrow to get sworn in as a special. I ain't going to have them coming in to the 'Stunners' to help themselves without pay. I don't know, and I don't care, a rap about the charter, and I don't believe one in fifty of them knows theirselves. What they want isn't the charter so much as their neighbour's goods. Well, they won't get my beer till some of 'em have gone down. They'll find that they have to pay for it one way or the other. Here we are, sir, and I ain't sorry, for I don't know that I was ever so dry in my life."

"So am I, Perkins; the heat and stench in that place was tremendous. The fighting, too, was warm while it lasted. I don't think any of us got hit."

"Hit!" said Perkins, contemptuously; "no,

nor we shouldn't have been if we had stopped there all night. Not as long as we could have kept them at arm's length. The worst of that sort of row is, that the fellows who are behind always want to get close, and they push the chaps in front on so that at last one gets jammed up into a heap, and can't use one's arms. No, I think we just stopped long enough. The leg of a table is a nasty sort of thing to come down on your guard. Now then, sir, what's your liquor?"

CHAPTER III.

A SLAP IN THE FACE.

FRANK MAYNARD'S departure for the country had been a relief both to Captain Bradshaw and Alice, and when he returned they were able to start anew upon something like their old footing. He was not at the house, however, as much as he had before been, for the London season was now beginning in earnest, and he was out nearly every night. Captain Bradshaw and Alice too were a good deal out, for although the old man would have greatly preferred to remain quietly at home, yet for Alice's sake he went into society, and when there enjoyed it perhaps more than she did. He would have a quiet rubber for a while, and would then go into the dancing room and look on with pleasure at the admiration which Alice attracted. And, indeed, Alice had many admirers, for she was a strikingly elegant girl, and an

abused Frank openly to his uncle than praise him as he did. Then too, he was always fond of drawing Frank into an argument when his uncle was present, and Frank never showed to advantage in these wordy conflicts. He was greatly deficient in quiet suavity; he could not hear views which he considered vicious expressed, and either hold his peace or dissent quietly. Frank gave his opinion with energy and heartiness, even with vehemence. He plunged into an argument as if he were personally aggrieved by the opinions stated upon the other side. He denounced and scouted them as heresies dangerous to mankind. A strong conservative, he hated radicalism with a personal hatred. He would willingly have buckled on armour and have settled the matter by a combat to the death between himself and the champion of the other party. In these conflicts then, which Fred was constantly provoking, Fred with his quiet sneering manner would greatly gain the advantage. His straight thrusts would be too fine and delicate for his cousin's slashing two-handed blows, and they not unfrequently ended by Frank's losing his temper.

During Frank's absence abroad Fred had been a great deal at Lowndes Square, and had, at least so Alice thought, tried hard to gain the place of first favourite with Captain Bradshaw. In this he had not succeeded. At present, however, while his uncle was still smarting under the overthrow of his pet plans, Alice had fears that Fred Bingham's attention and adroit flatteries were attaining their effect. Indeed, for the time being, he became prime favourite with his uncle, and in his absence Captain Bradshaw would sound his praises loudly to his ward, generally coupling them with disparaging remarks of the disgraced Frank. At first Alice had listened in silence, but finding that it was becoming a favourite theme with her uncle, she spoke out warmly in Frank's defence, declaring roundly that there was more truth and honesty in his little finger than in his cousin's whole composition. Her uncle, as was his wont, although nowise convinced, was yet fain to let the matter drop for the present. In addition to her championship of Frank, Alice had another reason for speaking out so decidedly. She had for some time felt that Fred was endeavouring to make


himself specially agreeable to her, and she now thought that her uncle was inclined to favour his efforts. Now Alice had, as has been said, a positive dislike to Fred Bingham, and although she could not help being amused by his talk, she yet believed that all this jesting and fun was a mere cloak which concealed a scheming and crafty disposition. After all these years of careful watching, she was convinced he was playing a deep game for his uncle's fortune, and she now saw at once that in the same way he was wishing to add her fortune to his pile. That he cared in the slightest degree for herself she did not for a moment believe.

Now of all these thoughts, suspicions, and opinions on the part of Alice Heathcote, Fred Bingham had not the remotest conception. Shrewd as he was, keenly alive to everything which concerned his own interests, he was yet completely in the dark as to Alice Heathcote's sentiments regarding him. Women in general he knew but little of, and understood even less : beside this he was intensely vain. He had been made a little god of at home, his mother and sisters looked up to him as the best of human

beings, and were never tired of doing him homage. Over and over again his mother had said in his hearing that Freddy ought to marry well, for that any girl must feel flattered by his attentions, and Fred's own experience when he did go into society was that girls were amused by his fun and caustic humour. He was profoundly ignorant of the fact that girls very seldom do fall in love with men who amuse them.

Fred Bingham then had long looked upon his success with Alice Heathcote as a certainty, only awaiting his making up his mind. Before Frank had left England, indeed, Fred had rather doubted whether Alice Heathcote did not prefer his cousin to himself, but he believed that his long absence had quite put him beyond the pale as a rival; and when, upon Frank's return, he had observed that there was a sort of reserve on Alice's part towards him, and that this reserve apparently increased rather than lessened with time, he considered his own success as secured. Then, too, with great pleasure he had seen that Frank was somehow in disgrace, and took the opportunity of his absence to make the greatest progress possible. What was the cause

of Frank's disgrace, Fred was ignorant, as Captain Bradshaw had upon no occasion even hinted the cause of his displeasure. Had he done so, Fred would have done all in his power to keep them apart: as it was, he was obliged to let matters take their course. The sole reason why Fred Bingham had not long before proposed to Alice Heathcote, was because he was doubtful about himself. Not doubtful as to whether he loved her, for upon that point he had no question at all; indeed, he had no belief whatever in love, and looked upon it as an absurdity quite out of place in business. If two people liked each other, and could get on well together, and the match was mutually advantageous, what more could be desired? The question in his mind was, should he get on well with Alice Heathcote? He liked her well enough, yes, he really liked her very much, and the match would be an advantageous one, but he was not quite so easy in his mind as to whether he should get on well with her. Now Fred's idea of a wife who would get on well with him was a woman who would do just as she was told, who would never set up her opinion against his, who would



in fact be a species of bond slave to his will. Now he had great doubts whether Alice Heathcote would do all this. He was in fact a little afraid of her. There was a quiet decision and firmness about her which made him feel uncomfortably that the combat between them would be a hard fought one; then too she was tall, and Fred did not like tall women. He fancied sometimes that if he got into a passion with her—and he allowed himself that he had a hasty temper—she would look down coldly contemptuous at him. There was another difficulty which presented itself, and which had for some time kept Fred Bingham in a state of uncertainty. Alice Heathcote's fortune was he knew about £50,000, and also that it was her own absolutely, and Fred felt certain that Captain Bradshaw would see that the greater part, if not the whole of it, were settled upon herself at her marriage. Now Fred Bingham was very much pressed for ready money; he was embarking with his father in several extensive affairs in which capital was all-essential. More than once his thoughts had turned to a young lady he had met near Manchester, who had lost her father, whose mother was old

and weak, and who had a fortune of about half the amount of that of Alice Heathcote at her own disposal. Miss Farrer was pretty, but with a weak prettiness which would not stand time. Her appearance did not belie her character; she was an affectionate and amiable, but weak girl. Fred had been very attentive to her, and had completely won her mother's heart by playing many games of cribbage with her, and losing almost invariably. So that altogether he felt sure of his ground there. It was not that he had actually any idea of marrying Miss Farrer, he felt too sure of success with Alice to think seriously of the other; but he was a cautious man, and liked to have a second string to his bow in case of accidents.

It was one morning after breakfast, about three weeks after Frank's return from the country, that Fred Bingham made up his mind to propose formally to Alice. He had been chatting with his father as to a contract, concerning which they were in treaty.

"The margin of profit is not as large as we could wish, Fred. If we were working with our own capital it would be different, but all this

discount and advance work makes a large hole in the margin of profit."

"I should think it did," Fred said, shortly, "it is not to-day that we have found that out."

"I think, Fred, that if I were you I should bring your affair with Miss Heathcote to a head. You have been going there now for a very long time; you tell me that you think you are pretty safe, and even if you do not touch any of her fortune, you would be able to borrow upon better terms as the husband of a rich woman; and, however things went, you would fall upon your feet. Besides, as the husband of Miss Heathcote, you would stand better with Captain Bradshaw."

"Yes, that's all true enough," Fred said, "and I've thought it all over a thousand times. I suppose it ought to be done, but I would rather remain as I am. However, needs must, I won't put it off any longer. I will settle it this afternoon. There, don't talk about it, it's bad enough to have to do it."

Half an hour afterwards Fred Bingham went out. First down to New Street, where he bought some cigars, as usual, and stayed for some time

in the shop smoking and talking with Carry. Then he went out and turned towards Knightsbridge. "She is an awfully nice child," he thought to himself. "I wish to goodness she was in Alice's place, and Alice in hers. I shouldn't mind even if she had that girl Farrer's money, I would marry her to-morrow. I wish I had never seen her, it would have been better for both of us. Well, it's no use thinking of that now, I must go through with this other business. The old man will have gone up to his club by this time. The sooner it is over the better." And so he went on to the house in Lowndes Square, where, as he expected, he found Alice Heathcote alone.

"Good morning, Alice, I have not gone up to town to-day, so I thought I would come in for a chat. You are not looking very well this morning. I miss the usual roses—I do not mean that lilies are less becoming—I only notice the change of flowers."

"My uncle is out," Alice said, ignoring the compliment. "He started for the club rather earlier than usual."

"I rather hoped he would be gone, Alice, for I was anxious to see you alone."

Alice saw what was coming, but her mind being fully made up upon the subject, she felt no nervousness, as she would have felt had she had the slightest belief that he really cared for her.

"The fact is, Alice, I want to ask you to marry me. I don't know how it's usually done, but that's what it comes to whichever way it's put. I have liked you very much for years now, I am sure we should suit each other very well, and I don't think the old gentleman would make any objection. What do you say, Alice?"

Fred Bingham had spoken in his usual off-hand way, but there was a little nervousness in his tone which showed that he felt distrust as to the result of his question.

"You put it in a very straightforward way, Fred," Alice said quietly, but with a little tinge of sarcasm; "and I am glad that you do so, as it makes it easier for me to say that I differ from you entirely as to our mutual suitability; and, therefore, must decline the honour you propose doing me."

"But I am quite in earnest, Alice; it is only my way, you know."

"I suppose you are in earnest, Fred, and I can assure you that I am at least equally so."

Fred Bingham paused for a moment, and then said, much more earnestly than he had spoken before,—

"I am afraid, Alice, that I am not going the right way about this. I love you very much, and have done so for years. You must have seen it. I know that usually men put all this in a sentimental sort of way, but that is quite out of my line. But I am not the less in earnest. I do love you very much, Alice. I always thought you knew it."

"I will be as frank with you, Fred, as you are with me. I have had an idea for some time past that you intended some day or other to make me an offer. Had you made love to me in the usual sort of way I should assuredly at once have shown you by my manner that the thing was out of the question. But you have never done so. You have been very often here. You have been very chatty and amusing. I could not show you that I did not wish you to come so often. I was obliged to wait. Had I believed, or did I now believe that you loved me, I should feel very great pain in refusing you; but,

although I did, and do believe that you wish to marry me, I do not believe that you have the slightest love for me in the real meaning of the word any more than I have for you."

Fred coloured up deeply now, and looked mortified and angry.

"But I tell you I do love you, Alice, and I suppose I know my own heart."

A little scornful smile crossed Alice's face.

"You may think you do, Fred. If it is so I am sorry; but I do not think that your heart has taken any share whatever in the proceeding. Neither of our hearts are in the slightest degree affected in the question, and there is, therefore, no occasion for me to feel sorrow, or for you to feel pain. It is a simple matter of opinion. You are of opinion that we should suit each other well, and that a marriage between us would be for our mutual benefit and gratification. I differ from you entirely upon both these points."

Alice was so perfectly cool and composed that Fred felt that any further urging would be useless. His rage and mortification were excessive, and he was far more angry at having been so completely read and seen through by Alice,

when he had believed himself so safe, than at the overthrow of his plans.

"May I ask," he said, bitterly, "if you have any other reasons beyond those you have given?"

"You certainly may not," Alice said, with spirit. "I have already given you for answer that I do not love you, and I conceive that to be quite sufficient answer for any gentleman."

Fred Bingham stood irresolute for a moment, and then turned to go; but his temper got the better of him, and he said, with a sneer,—

"I was a fool to have asked for the reason, Alice, when I know it as well as you do yourself. If it had been Frank——"

He did not continue, for Alice Heathcote leaped from her seat as if she had been struck with a blow, her cheeks flushed with a sudden flame of colour and her eyes flashing, but before she could speak Fred Bingham was gone. His last hit had been almost a random one, for he had never really suspected Alice of caring for Frank. He had been too well satisfied with his own chance to imagine that he had a serious rival in Frank. Even now he was not sure. Alice's indignant look might be explained by her natural

anger at his own taunt. "I was a fool to let my beastly temper get the better of me," he said to himself; "the matter was bad enough as it stood without making an enemy of her. Not that she'll do me any harm. She can't well go and tell my uncle what I said. However, it was a foolish thing to do. It's been a nice morning's work altogether. To think she should have been all this time laughing at me. Evidently I don't understand women. I believe she cares for Frank. That's another notch to your score, Master Frank. If I ever get a chance to wipe them out, look out, that's all."

It was with bitter mortification and anger that Fred Bingham returned to Hans Place, and briefly told his father that Alice Heathcote had refused him. He gave no details, nor did Mr. Bingham ask for any, for he saw that Fred was in one of those moods when he was better left alone.

CHAPTER IV.

A LIGHT IN THE GLOOM.

THE great bubble had burst at last. Those who blew it had worked so hard, and had blown up such a bulky affair that they had really forgotten that it was all wind and suds, a mere baseless fabric which would burst and leave nothing behind it at the first resistance of a solid substance. But so it was. The great Chartist conspiracy had swelled and swelled, unmolested by Government, until, relying upon its bulk, it sought to assert itself. Government stood firm, and the bubble collapsed. The affair, however, had been of too serious dimensions to be altogether passed over, and a few of the most conspicuous among the Chartist leaders were taken, tried, and condemned to transportation. At their trial they found, as conspirators have almost always done, that there had been a traitor in

their midst, that the whole details of their intended movements were as well known to the Government as to themselves. Who the traitor was they did not discover. The evidence was ample without calling him personally, but many and deep were the vows of vengeance sworn against him should he ever be discovered. Among the condemned was William Holl, who was sentenced to seven years' transportation.

Evan Holl learnt the news one afternoon when he had asked leave to go down to Knightsbridge. He came back before the hour at which he usually returned from his father's. Frank himself let him in.

"You are early, Evan."

"Yes, sir."

Frank noticed that the boy did not speak in his usual cheery tone.

"Anything the matter, lad?"

"Yes, sir; there is a terrible upset at home. Mother's crying, and Aunt Bessy's crying fit to break her heart, and everything is upside down."

"That sounds bad, Evan; come into my room and tell me what is the matter."

Prescott was there, as was his custom in the evening, when Frank was at home.

"Now, Evan, tell us all about it."

"If you please, sir, Uncle Will has got transported."

"Got transported, Evan! Why, what has your Uncle Will been doing?"

"Please, sir, he's been going and being a Chartist."

"Oh, is the Holl who was tried to-day your uncle, Evan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whew," whistled Frank, "that is a bad business; how the deuce could the man have made such a fool of himself?"

"Please, sir, I don't know," Evan answered, taking Frank's ejaculation as a direct question addressed to himself.

"No, I don't suppose you do, Evan, and I don't suppose he does himself, which is more to the point. The question is, what is to be done?"

There was silence for a moment, and then Evan said, hesitatingly,—

"You don't think you could get him off,

sir, do you? It will break Aunt Bessy's heart."

"No, Evan, that is quite out of the question; your uncle is a fool, and must pay for his folly. I could do nothing for him if I wished it ever so much, and I am not sure that I do wish it at all. I have neither patience with nor pity for these men. It is the wife I am thinking of, as he ought to have been, before he ran his head against a wall. Something might be done for her, though I don't plainly see what. There, Evan, go off to bed, I will talk it over with Mr. Prescott."

The result of the talk was that the friends drove down the following morning to Knightsbridge. Mrs. Holl—her honest face swollen and red from crying—was, as usual, washing. Her sister-in-law sat by the fire in an apathy of sorrow. She could cry no more, and, worn out by her grief, looked the image of despondency. When the young men entered she did not even look up or appear to notice their presence.

"Evan has been telling us, Mrs. Holl," Frank began, "about this bad affair of your husband's brother. Of course nothing can be done in his

case, but we came to ask what his wife intends to do."

"Bless the poor creature," Mrs. Holl said, "she ain't even thought about it. She is grieving too much over that husband of hers. There, I have no patience with him, though he be my John's brother. To think what a tidy chap he were, and what a steady good workman, before he took up with these Chartist goings-on."

"Yes," Bessy Holl said, speaking suddenly, and almost startling her listeners, for she had appeared lost in her own thoughts, as indeed she was, having probably but a vague idea of what was being said; "yes, Bill was that; there was not his equal, I've heard say, at planing and grooving, and moulding and tongueing. But there," and here she broke into a sort of hysterical laughter, "it's the tongueing that's done it, and I knew it would all along. God forgive me!" she again broke out after a pause, "I don't know what I am talking about," and then she began to cry quietly again, rocking herself to and fro.

"I will tell you what I thought, Mrs. Holl.

You see, when a convict first goes out he is put to work upon the roads. After he has been at that for some time, in proportion to the length of his sentence, he is hired out to one of the farmers, and a year or two afterwards, if his conduct continues good, he gets a ticket-of-leave, and does as he pleases. Now, in the present case, as the sentence is only for seven years, it is probable that your brother will not be kept more than a year upon public work, and will then be hired to a farmer. No disgrace will attach to him afterwards for having been a convict for his political opinions, and he may yet live to make an honest name and a fair position in Australia. Now, my idea is that his wife should sail a year after him and join him there; it is probable that she would find no difficulty in getting employment about the house or dairy wherever he may be. Women are scarce there. The passage money out is about twenty-five pounds, and say another ten pounds for expenses out there until she is settled—thirty-five pounds. Now, Mrs. Holl, I have plenty of money and I don't see that I can do better with it than to lend this money

to your sister-in-law. I am a very unsettled man and do not know where I may be at the end of some months, so I have handed over the money to Mr. Prescott here, and at the end of a year, if Mrs. Holl is ready to start to join her husband, he will give it to her."

As he finished, Bessy Holl rose from her chair and tottered three steps forward, and then fell upon her knees. Then she tried to speak, but tears and sobs choked her, and she could only gasp out, "God bless you! God bless you! to think, only a year—my William, my William!" and she went off in violent hysterics.

The young men assisted Mrs. Holl to raise her, and to carry her into the next room and lay her upon a bed, and then Frank said, "We had better leave her to you, Mrs. Holl; she will soon be better."

Mrs. Holl turned to him and took his hand, "Young gentleman," she said, solemnly, "the thought of that poor child's joyful cry will ring in your ears and gladden your heart may be for many a year to come. You will have your reward, as the good book says. I am a rough

woman, sir, and can no more thank you than that poor creature there, but my prayers can do you no harm, and you will have them, sir. May God in heaven bless you, sir, and make you a very happy man, as you deserve to be ! ”

It was two days later that Sarah and Bessy Holl were shown into the waiting-room of the prison where William Holl was confined. He was to be taken to Portland, whence he was in a short time to be shipped for Australia. It was a small room, and after they were ushered into it they sat for nearly five minutes in silence before the door was opened. Bessy was calm and composed now ; her face was sad but no longer hopeless ; perhaps, indeed, if she could have read her own heart she would have found that she was really happier than she had been for months past. Her life, indeed, had lately been one long anxiety and care. She had seen ruin gradually coming upon them ; her husband, from being one of the best of workmen and the most cheerful of husbands, had become an idle, moody man ; her home had been broken up, and she herself had suffered the actual pangs of hunger. And never for a

moment had Bessy believed in her husband's schemes and aspirations, but had all along had a prison, or perhaps a gallows, before her eyes as the end which must sooner or later befall him. Now all this weary strain of thought and care was over. Her husband would, indeed, be separated from her for a year—but what was a year? At the end of that time there was a future before them, a fresh home in a new country, honest labour and contentment and happiness, and William would yet again be the William she had loved and married.

Thoughts something like these were running in her mind, when the door opened and her husband entered. He was already in convict attire, and all Bessy's glad thoughts faded, and she gave a little cry as she looked at his pale, haggard face. She tottered forward and fell half fainting on his neck.

"My poor girl," he said, softly, "my poor girl, and I have brought you to this; this is the end of all my hopes and plans."

Sarah Holl went to the barred window and looked out into the narrow court. She so pitied Bessy, and was so out of all patience, as she

said herself, with her husband that she could not bring herself to speak kindly to him. Yet, for Bessy's sake, she would not embitter their last meeting. So she looked steadily out of the window, and stood there alternating between anger and pity, now longing to turn round and upbraid William Holl for his madness and folly, now crying quietly to herself in relenting sorrow.

William Holl placed his wife in a chair and then knelt down beside her.

"Oh Bessy, Bessy! what can I say, how can I ask you to forgive me? I have destroyed your life, Bessy, and yet I would have given mine to make you happy. When I think, Bessy, how happy we were, how bright and gay you were only a year ago and see what I have brought you to, I could die, Bessy—oh! how gladly—if I could recall the past and have never seen you. I see now how right you were, and how mad I have been—how miserably mad—to think that all the idle hands who were willing to spend their time in talking and drinking, and making speeches, were patriots ready to die for the cause of freedom. I have been a fool, Bessy, but, oh,

that I could have my punishment alone! Why must I drag you down to misery too? Even had things been as I thought them, what right had I to devote myself, as I thought, to my country, and to sacrifice my wife? Oh, Bessy! you may forgive me, but I never can forgive myself."

Bessy, up to this time, had not spoken a word. Sometimes she had tried to stop her husband, but her own sobs had prevented her.

"I do forgive you with all my heart, William. You did what you thought was right; you never meant to make me unhappy, you never thought ——" and here she broke down again.

"No, Bessy," he said, sadly, "I never did think, but I ought to have thought. I was a dreamer, and I wilfully blinded myself. I have not even the satisfaction of knowing that I was ignorant. I knew you suffered, I knew you wanted bread, but I went on. Oh Bessy, Bessy! I have gone all wrong, but it is hard upon you. I was born to be a blight and a curse to you."

"No, no, William!" the wife broke out; "no, no, not that."

"Yes, Bessy, it is so. I know my brother and his wife are good people. They will take care of

you, dear. I shall never see you again. Hear me out, darling. I only hope that it will not be for long. I am not strong, and I do not think I shall last many months. I hope not, I pray to God not. It is all I can do for you now, Bessy; to die and set you free. But you will think of me kindly, dear: think of me as I used to be before I went mad, as the William who courted you long ago. Will you promise me this, Bessy?"

Bessy was crying too much to speak.

"Oh! William," she sobbed out at last; "you must not talk so, you will kill me. We are going to be happy yet. Yes, yes," she said, as he shook his head in sad denial; "you don't know, you have not heard what I have to tell you. I am coming out to you, dear. In a little time, they tell me, they will let you out of prison to work with a farmer, and in a year I am to start to you; only a year, William, think of that. Mr. Maynard, God bless him, has given me the money, and in a year after you get out I shall be by your side. Think of it, William. And he said, too, there was no disgrace in being sent out for politics, and that some day you would get on and be well thought of again.

Yes, it is all true, William, I am only come to say good-bye for a year."

William Holl had listened at first with incredulity, then with a flash of joyful hope, and then with the deep silent thankfulness of conviction. Then he got up and held his wife to his heart.

"Yes, yes, I feel it is true," he said; "my own Bessy, once again my own, we shall be happy yet." Then again releasing her, he said solemnly: "Let us kneel down, Bessy, and thank God together, and let us pray Him to bless the man who has thus, in the time of our misery, given us new life and hope." Bessy knelt in silence beside her husband, and in a voice broken by deep emotion he went on: "Thou merciful God, I thank thee that in our hour of misery Thou has had mercy upon us. Grant us a re-union in the land to which I go; and enable me, by a life of earnest toil, to atone for my error here, and to console my wife for the grief I have caused her. And, O God, bless, I pray thee, our benefactor, and shower blessings and mercies upon him, as he has blessed and been merciful to us, Amen."

And the sobbing women repeated "Amen" after him.

The remaining quarter of an hour of the time allotted for the visit was spent in discussing arrangements, and in drawing happy pictures of the future, and when the turnkey opened the door and said that time was up, they parted with tears indeed, but with hearts full of anticipation of re-union and a happy future.

CHAPTER V.

SPRETÆ INJURIA FORMÆ.

DURING the time which had intervened between William Holl's arrest and his trial, and during the anxious time of the trial itself, Carry Walker had called in nearly every day to comfort Mrs. Holl. When the trial was over, however, she had, for a few days, ceased her visits, for she felt that she could do or say nothing to alleviate Bessy's distress. Upon her first visit she was surprised to find Bessy sitting at her needle-work with a look of absolute contentment upon her face ; while Mrs. Holl was, as usual, engaged in washing.

"How are you, Mrs. Holl? I am glad to see your sister-in-law is looking better. How are you, Bessy?"

"Oh! I am quite well, Miss Walker, and so happy now."

Carry looked surprised.

"Happy!" she repeated. "Has your husband been pardoned?"

"No, miss; but haven't you heard?"

"No," Carry said, "I have heard nothing. I have not been in for the last few days because I was afraid of being in the way. What has happened?"

"Why, Miss Carry," Sarah Holl broke out, "you'd hardly believe it, but it's true; a gentleman, God bless him, has offered to pay Bessy's passage out to Australia to join William there, and in another year she'll be starting."

"That is very kind of him, Mrs. Holl. Who is he?"

"His name is Maynard, him as our Evan is with."

James was watching Carry's face, and saw a sudden rush of colour come up into it at the name. To tell the truth, Carry had thought a good deal of Frank Maynard since that solitary visit of his. His having saved her father's life had endowed him in her eyes with all the qualities of a hero of romance. She had thought over that interview very many times, and never with-

out blushing at the thoughts of the kiss she had given him. He had said he would come again, and very eagerly had she looked forward to his next visit, but as days and weeks had passed on without his coming, she felt both very resentful and hurt. Did he think her so forward that he would not come again? Or did he not think them worth another visit? Her only consolation had been that perhaps he was out of town all this time. And now this hope was dispelled, and Carry blushed even deeper than before with pique and wounded pride.

"Is it the Mr. Maynard who lives in the Temple?" she asked, clinging to a last hope.

"Yes, Miss Carry. Do you know him?"

"A little," Carry said, coldly; "he picked my father up one evening last winter when he had slipped down in Knightsbridge."

The cripple lad noticed all this—the first sudden blush at his name, then the coldness of manner and the slighting way in which she spoke of a service which, he remembered well, she had described in such enthusiastic terms not long before. What could this mean? Carry afterwards was rather ashamed of her little fit of

petulance, and listened with great interest to the account of Bessy Holl's hopes and plans for the future. Then, after a few words to James, she took her leave.

Very often afterwards James pondered the matter over in his mind, while his fingers almost mechanically worked at his wax flowers. "Why should Carry have blushed so deeply upon hearing Mr. Maynard's name suddenly mentioned, and why should she have spoken so coldly of him when she had formerly been so enthusiastic in his praises as the preserver of her father's life?" All this was utterly beyond James's comprehension. His knowledge of the world was completely confined to what he had learned from books, and he owned with a sigh that his books were of no assistance whatever to him in the present case. All that, after great thought, he arrived at satisfactorily, or rather unsatisfactorily, to himself was, that there was some mystery or other, although of what nature he could not even guess, between Carry Walker and Mr. Maynard.

Carry Walker was a spoilt child. She had managed her father from the day when she was able to climb upon his knee, and insist, with

much coaxing certainly and patting of his cheeks, and other pretty ways, but insisting nevertheless, upon having her own way. Very spoilt she had grown up, with no mother to control or check her, and with a father who allowed her to do in every respect as she pleased. Very spoilt had she afterwards been—for all the admiration and flattery she had received during the last two years was enough to have turned the heads of half-a-dozen girls. She had never had a mother's care or advice, or the healthy society of girls of her own age. The chances had been all against her, and she was little to be blamed in that she had grown up somewhat vain and flighty. Carry was indignant all that afternoon, and was angry with herself for being so. During that time she had no opportunity of speaking to her father, and it was not until she sat down to tea that she had an opportunity of doing so.

“I was in at the Holls' this afternoon, father.”

“And how is that unfortunate woman, my dear? Dear me, dear me, I cannot understand why men will neglect their business and go about talking about affairs which don't concern them.

I cannot see, Carry, upon my life I cannot, what good can possibly come of it. I told William Holl so. I cautioned him that he would find out his mistake too late. But there, I might as well have talked to the wind. These all but uneducated young fellows have an idea that the whole wisdom of the nation is centred in their heads. All the questions which have occupied and puzzled the wisest men of the nation, who have given their whole attention to them, these young fellows solve in the twinkling of an eye to their own perfect satisfaction. And now what has come of it? He has got transported, and upon my life I don't pity him at all. But there's his poor wife left behind to shift for herself. I am very sorry for her. But for the matter of that, she will do as well without him as with him. He has been a world of trouble to her, and I believe he has done no work at all for the last four or five months; talk, talk, talk, nothing but talk, my dear. It won't keep the pot boiling. Still it is sad for her, for I believe she loves him, idle scamp as he is. I wonder what will become of her?"

"That is just what I am going to tell you,

father, when you give me a chance," Carry, who had been quietly continuing her tea, said. "I am only waiting till you give me an opportunity of slipping in a word. It seems that the gentleman, Evan Holl is with as a servant, has heard of William Holl's sentence to transportation, and of his leaving a wife behind him, and he has offered to pay Bessy's expenses out to join him. It seems that in a year or so he can get a ticket-of-leave, and then she can be with him."

"That is very good of him, Carry."

"It is Mr. Maynard, father, the gentleman who picked you up when you slipped down in Knightsbridge that night, you know."

"You don't say so, Carry? How extraordinary. I remember now John Holl telling me his boy had gone out to service with a gentleman named Maynard, but I didn't know, it never struck me, as being the same. Dear me, what a kind-hearted young man, to be sure."

Carry was silent a moment, and then said pettishly, "Of course he is very kind-hearted, father; but I think he might have come again. I call it downright rude."

Stephen Walker paused in his tea in utter

astonishment. He had never given the matter a thought since the evening of Frank Maynard's visit, and this displeasure on the part of his daughter was to him singular and unreasonable in the extreme.

"Bless me, Carry," he said, "you surprise me. Why should Mr. Maynard come again? He came over to see after me, and I was very glad that he did come that we might thank him; but why, in the name of goodness, should he come again?"

Carry had no particular reason to give, so she only said generally that she "thought he would come again."

"Now, Carry, that is not at all like you. I call that unreasonable. Why, because Mr. Maynard saved my life, and afterwards took the trouble to come down to see me, he should be bound to come again to a place like this to talk to people like ourselves, I really can't conceive. No, Carry, for once in your life you are wrong, and I am sure you will own it."

Carry did not own it, but tossed her head a little in dissent at the light in which her father put it.

"But, father, I am sure Mr. Maynard was pleased with you, very pleased; you chatted together like friends, upon travels and all sorts of things, and I am sure he did not look down upon you at all."

"Not for the time being, Carry," Stephen Walker said gravely; "Mr. Maynard was a gentleman and treated me under my own roof as a gentleman. He found that we had topics upon which we could discourse in common. He was no doubt surprised, and perhaps, as you say, pleased; but, Carry, there are thousands of men of his own class in life with whom he has not only that but a hundred other topics in common, and why should he come down here to talk to me? No, Carry, you are really not reasonable."

Carry was silent. She could not explain that she was angry that Frank Maynard had not come down to see her, and was therefore obliged to let the matter drop. Still, upon subsequent reflection, Carry did not feel the less piqued. She was hurt, and was angry with herself for being so.

If he did not care to see her, she certainly

did not care for seeing him. There were plenty of other gentlemen, the same as he was, who could appreciate her and were eager enough to talk with her. If Mr. Maynard came again she would take care to let him know that there were other people, just as good as he was, who were not too high and mighty to admire her. There was Mr. Bingham, for instance, he was always there, always kind and pleasant and cheerful. Evidently he cared for her. Here Carry's thoughts wandered off: "Yes, it would be very nice to be a lady, no more living in a little shop and selling newspapers and tobacco, but a real lady, with nice dresses and servants, and, perhaps, carriages, and above all a home for dear old father after all his troubles and cares. Oh! how nice that would be, how very happy!" And Carry's thoughts, which had been gloomy enough at the commencement of her reverie, ended by drawing a very bright picture indeed.

Carry's thoughts once fairly directed to this subject they returned again to it very frequently. By what her father had said she would have been a lady had he not been un-

fortunate, and why should she not regain the position for herself and him? Indeed, she had felt strongly attracted by Fred Bingham. She liked the merry, good tempered, cheerful young fellow; he was so attentive, so evidently fond of her. Indeed, it was only the strong influence which the one visit of Frank Maynard had exercised over her which had hitherto kept this feeling in check. Now, smarting with pique and resentment against Frank, the feeling returned with redoubled force. Why, she asked herself, should she throw away an honest love for a chimera? Why should she not make herself happy with Fred Bingham? And so from this time she relaxed in her stiffness with him, and his visits to the tobacconist's became longer and more frequent, the conversations between them more interesting and confidential, and there was less of badinage now, and more of blushing on her part.

Carry was a very simple, innocent girl. Brought up under her father's wing, she had absolutely no thought of evil. As soon as she really felt Fred Bingham loved her, she had little hesitation in giving her whole heart to

him, and in feeling very happy in so doing. And so time went on, and the gossips of the street began to remark how very often that fair young gentleman was in at Walker's shop, and the ill-natured ones soon began to shake their heads and to say, it was a pity Carry Walker had not a mother to look after her. Which, indeed, it was. She was ignorant and unsuspicious of harm as Una herself, only, unfortunately, she had no lion to protect her. A mother would have told her that even if she considered herself engaged to Fred Bingham, as in another two or three months she did, it would yet be much wiser not to meet him accidentally so often during the walks, which, at her father's wish, she was in the habit of taking daily. But Carry had no such adviser, and never dreamt on the edge of what a precipice she was walking.

CHAPTER VI.

LOSING THE GLOVES.

" I TELL you what, Frank, you are getting extremely snappish and disagreeable," Prescott said one day to his friend, "the sooner you go out of town the better."

" Do you know, Prescott, I quite agree with you. I am. I am sick of this sort of life, and I want a change."

" You were talking of buying a yacht, Frank. We are in June now. If you really mean to do anything in that way this year, it is time to be seeing about it."

" Pooh! nonsense, man. You know what I mean. I want to go down into Staffordshire again, but I don't see what excuse to make."

" I suppose the proper thing to do, Frank, is to write to Mr. Drake to ask his permission to pay your addresses to his niece."

"What a fellow you are, Prescott! You do make the most ridiculous propositions of any man I ever met."

"It is a pity you did not ask her before you came away, Frank," Prescott said, after a pause.

"How could I, man?" Frank said irritably. "I was there little over three weeks, and I was not sure about myself for the first fortnight. If it had been summer, and we had had picnics and all that sort of thing, where you can manage to get alone with a girl and make your running, it would have been different; but in a house full of people I had no opportunities whatever. It was only that last week too that I had quite made up my own mind about it. You don't suppose a woman is like a peach, and that you only have to open your mouth for her to fall into it. Katie is a good deal too great a prize to jump at the first bait. Besides Katie and I fought so, and, I confess, I teased her so much, that she got to look upon everything I said as chaff, and if I had told her I loved her, the chance was she would have laughed in my face, and serve me right too."

I don't think she had any idea I really cared for her, and I believe, upon my word, that at one time she positively disliked me. At any rate it was altogether out of the question my speaking at the time, and it would be just as absurd my writing to her now. Besides, writing about those sort of affairs is a mistake. Things that sound real and earnest enough when you say them, look mere sentimental bosh when they're put down on paper. No, upon my word, I don't see my way. It's little over two months since I left, and I can't offer to go down again, especially in June—there is no excuse that I can see. There is no hunting or shooting, if I did either, which I don't. What the deuce could I want to go down into Staffordshire in June for?" And Frank, in extreme perplexity, looked at Prescott for assistance.

"You have quite made up your mind, Frank?"

"Of course, my dear fellow, am I not telling you so?"

"Well, Frank, in that case what I should recommend is this. I should really write to Mr. Drake, not a formal letter, you know, but

a friendly straightforward one, say that you are desirous of paying your addresses to his niece, that in the confusion and the number of people in the house you had not the opportunity of doing so before. That you are perfectly unaware of her feelings towards you, and that you are desirous of being a short time in her society again before you speak to her, and you therefore ask him if he will again extend his hospitality to you. I think that is about the way to put it. You might ask him to say nothing to Miss O'Byrne respecting your visit, as it might cause an awkwardness between you."

"By Jove, yes!" Frank said, "I would as soon do battle with a lioness as meet Katie O'Byrne, after our late encounters, if she knew for certain that I had come down to make formal love to her. No, no, Prescott, it would destroy my chance altogether. I must request absolutely that Katie shall know nothing about it. She may guess what she likes. She can't take a high ground because she guesses, but if she were officially informed of it, I should no more be able to hold my own with her than I should to fly. Altogether I think it is a very good

idea. Yes, I will write at once. Now, Prescott, you dictate it, you have a legal mind, you know, and I will write. But what do you say to writing to Teddy instead of to Mr. Drake? I can ask him to put it to his father, you know, and it will be less formal—eh?”

Prescott said that he saw no objection, and in that case he did not think he need dictate the letter. To this Frank agreed, and wrote as follows:—

“MY DEAR TEDDY,

“I dare say what I am going to tell you will surprise you; but, the fact is, I have really fallen awfully in love with Katie O’Byrne. Now, you see, last time I was down there I had not time to make my running. There was too much going on, you see, and too many people about. Now I do think, Teddy, I could make her happy if she could care for me. I want you to give me a chance. Will you speak to your father and mother and tell them what I wish, and ask them to allow me to try to make Katie in love with me. You can mention that, so far as means are concerned, I

have eight hundred a-year of my own, and Uncle Harry, you know Captain Bradshaw, has always treated me as his son, and no doubt at his death I shall come into a considerable fortune. Should they offer no objection, will you write and ask me to come down again for a fortnight, but above all, Teddy, do not let a word be said to either your sister or Kate. If Sarah knows it Katie is certain to find it out, and I could no more face her in that formal sort of way than I could fly. It would knock any chance I might have completely on head. Write soon, Teddy, for I shall be in an awfully nervous state till I hear from you. Be sure and keep it dark as to what I am coming down for—say you have asked me down to do some hunting, or something of that sort.

“Yours ever,

“FRANK MAYNARD.”

Teddy Drake received this epistle at breakfast, and its contents threw him into a state of profound astonishment. He had not had the slightest idea of Frank's feelings towards Katie, and when he recovered from his astonishment

was most delighted. He had given one long whistle of surprise when he had arrived at the second line, but had read on to the end in silence without heeding the questions of the girls as to what was the matter with him.

"Now, Teddy, what is it?" Sarah asked as he finished. "What does Frank say, to surprise you so?" for Teddy had apprised them who his correspondent was before he had begun to read.

"Is it what does he say?" Teddy repeated, in order to gain time to invent an answer.

"Yes, of course, Teddy, how tiresome you are."

"Frank is thinking of becoming a monk and joining a holy community."

"No, don't be talking nonsense, Teddy."

"Well, Sarah, he's talking of going out to Arabia and becoming a dancing dervish."

"Don't ask him, Sarah," Katie said indignantly; "if he doesn't choose to tell us, sure and we don't want to know. Come along, we will go and practise our duet."

When they had left the room Teddy turned to his father and mother: "Frank has written to ask me to ask you to let him run down again, to make love to Katie."

"Really, Teddy, you talk so much nonsense I do not know when you are speaking the truth," Mr. Drake said, while Mrs. Drake uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I am as serious as possible this time," Teddy said, and he read out a portion of Frank's letter.

"I am very glad," Mrs. Drake said, "and to think I had never guessed it. I am so glad, he is such a nice fellow, and it will be a very good thing for Katie. Don't you think so, Robert?"

"Yes, my dear, I do not see any objection in any way. Mr. Maynard is a little too rackety to suit me, but I do not know that that will be any objection in Katie's eyes. By all means, Teddy, write and ask him to come down; and try and don't do anything foolish, if you can help it, or speak about his coming. If you had not made a sort of mystery about his letter this morning we could have mentioned naturally enough that he was coming down for a short time for change of air, or we could have made some excuse or other. As it is it will be better to say nothing about it, and leave him to

explain matters for himself as best he can. Ask him to come down, say on Tuesday. There is the gig at the door, are you ready, Teddy?"

Upon reaching his office, Teddy Drake sat down to write to Frank Maynard.

"MY DEAR FRANK,

"I am delighted at hearing that you are smitten by the archer boy (isn't that the delicate way of putting it?) and especially that the person by whom you are so smitten is my cousin Katie. By the way, according to that way of putting it, Katie would be the archer boy, which is absurd. So my metaphor is wrong somewhere, but after reading it over several times, I can't for the life of me see where. However you see what I mean, and Katie and the archer boy have both somehow had to do with the business, but they've got mixed up together till I can't tell which is which. Seriously I am awfully glad, Frank. To think of your falling in love with Katie! I never dreamt of such a thing, and the elders are equally surprised. Now that you have told me about it, I fancy that Sarah may have

had some suspicion that there was a weakness somewhere, for sometimes when your name has been mentioned, she has been rather inclined to chaff Katie, which Katie has resented very seriously. My father sends word that he shall be very glad if you will come down and stay with us again, and named next Tuesday. Come by the ten o'clock train in the morning, it gets here at three. I will meet you at the station. I have read as much of your letter as was necessary to the elders, and they as well as myself are pleased at the thought of you and Katie coming together. We shall strictly obey your injunction, and say nothing to the girls about the object of your coming. Indeed we shall not say you are coming at all, for I was too surprised when I got your letter to invent any excuse at the time, and if I were to say anything about it now, they would think it was odd I did not mention it at the time, and would suspect something was up. If, however, you would rather not take them by surprise, write a line by return of post, and then I will say that you have written to say you are coming for a few days, on your way, say to Ireland. On reading over this letter I find it is barely

coherent, but I dare say you will understand it.

“Yours very truly,

“E. DRAKE.”

Katie O'Byrne had thought more often during these two months of Frank Maynard than was at all satisfactory to herself. She had so repeatedly asserted that she did not like him, that her assurances lost power even with herself. At last, however, she could no longer shut her eyes to the fact, but was forced to own that she had been deceiving herself all along, and that she did like, yes, like Frank Maynard very much. It was with deep mortification that Katie made this confession even to herself, because, in spite of what Sarah had said, she did not believe that Frank had ever thought of her, and because he had so teased and made fun of her, that she told herself she ought to hate him. Still when she thought over that sentence about the sea, and the quiet tone in which he had said, “Yes, Katie, you will believe me some day,” the colour would mount up into her cheeks, and she would think that perhaps after all he did care for her. But

although Miss O'Byrne came at last to own to herself that she had been wrong, and that she liked Frank Maynard very, very much, she was by no means disposed to make the same concession to Sarah. So, whenever her cousin turned the conversation to the subject, said how she missed Frank, and wondered whether he would ever come again, Katie manifested such perfect indifference upon both points, that Sarah at last came to the conclusion that she had made a mistake, and that there was no chance of her ever winning the gloves.

On the Tuesday afternoon, the girls were together in the drawing-room, which looked over the lawn.

"Teddy has gone down to the station has he not?" Katie asked.

"Yes, he ordered the dog-cart to be at the office at three, in time to take him to meet the train. I wonder what he can be up to, for when he said so, he winked at mamma, and she shook her head and frowned, but smiled too; I wonder what it can be about?"

"Indeed and I don't know," Katie said, "and I don't suppose it's worth guessing about."

"I don't know," Sarah said, "there has been something going on for the last two or three days between Teddy and mamma, some quiet joke, and I am not sure papa is not in it too, for I have seen him smiling two or three times to himself, when there was nothing going on to smile at; and do you know, Katie, I have half an idea that it's something about you."

"Faith, and I'm not curious, Sarah," Katie said composedly, "Teddy will be back in a few minutes, and the secret will keep till then."

Presently they heard the sound of wheels in the drive, and Sarah said, "Come along, Katie, we'll catch him in the hall, and see what he's brought," and she went out followed by her cousin.

As they went into the large hall, the front door was opened, and Teddy entered followed by Frank Maynard. Sarah uttered an exclamation of surprise, and hurried forward to meet him; as she did so, Katie whispered indignantly, "Sarah, I hate you; I'll never forgive you."

"Why, Frank," Sarah said warmly, "this is a surprise, I am glad to see you again."

"And I'm glad to be back again, Sarah." Then

Frank turned to Katie, who was coming forward slowly, and rather reluctantly, for she felt that her cheeks were telling unmistakably that she was not uninterested in this unexpected arrival. Frank greeted her with, "How are you, Miss O'Byrne?—but I need not ask, it's charming you're looking any way."

"Don't flatter yourself that it's from pleasure at seeing you again, Mr. Maynard."

"Don't say that, Miss O'Byrne, it's downright cruel; I've been picturing you to myself sitting with your watch in your hand, counting the minutes to my arrival."

"You are wrong, anyhow," Katie said with indignant triumph, "for I did not even know you were coming. Teddy," she said, turning to her cousin, "why did you not tell me Mr. Maynard was coming down?"

"I asked him not to say anything about it, Miss O'Byrne," Frank said, seeing Katie was really indignant, "either to you or his sister, I thought it would be a surprise, and I hoped a pleasant one."

"And really and truly did not you know, Sarah?" Katie asked, for up to this time she

believed that it had been a plot on the part of all the others to keep her in the dark, and that Sarah especially had endeavoured to surprise her by bringing her suddenly upon Frank.

"Really and truly, Katie, I had no more idea than you had."

"Well," Katie said, mollified, "in that case I forgive you, Teddy, I thought you were all tricking me. I didn't mean to be cross, Mr. Maynard," she said frankly, "only I thought I was being made a fool of, and I hate that," and she shook hands with him again and looked up unflinchingly at him with her honest eyes.

It was not until evening that, when Sarah was playing, Frank had an opportunity of speaking alone to Katie, "I am sorry I vexed you, Miss O'Byrne."

"It was stupid of me to be vexed," Katie said, "but I always hate surprises, and I thought Sarah had known it all along, and was trying to make me look ridiculous. I am sorry for it, Mr. Maynard."

"Then you were not really sorry to see me again, Katie, it was not that?"

"No," Katie said gently, "it was not that."

"I have been looking forward so much to seeing you again," Frank said.

"Oh, yes," the girl answered, "I suppose you wanted some one to plague."

"Do you really dislike being plagued, Katie, honestly now? I won't do it any more if you do."

She was silent awhile, and then said, "I did not like it at first, but now I begin to understand you I don't mind; only I can't help being vexed, and then I am ashamed afterwards."

"Yes, Katie," Frank said, "I know I used to tease you abominably; but you remember what I told you about the sea?"

"Well, Mr. Maynard, you talked so much nonsense, that I can hardly remember one part more than another." Katie rose to go to the piano, but Frank could see by her face that she did remember it for all that.

Katie did not go into Sarah's room that night, but kissed her at the door. Sarah said, "Katie, dear, the kid gloves will be mine after all." The cousin did not answer, but went on into her room and shut the door. She was happy, and felt that she need not check herself. Now

she really had cause to think that Frank loved her—and although she had laughingly turned off his words, she felt he was in earnest—she no longer struggled with her feelings, but acknowledged to herself, that all along she had loved him.

The next week passed very quietly. Frank still teased Katie, and Katie fought sturdily, but she felt the battle was lost. There was no mistaking the quiet tone in which he sometimes spoke to her, so different from his general strain of light jesting with her, and the way in which he spoke to others. She fought because it was her nature to fight, but she was no longer indignant at his sallies—fought as a beaten enemy, surrounded and outnumbered fights, as a matter of honour and not of hope. She resisted occasionally, and tried to struggle against the influence he exerted over her. But the bird was in the net and knew it. She beat her wings and fluttered in vain; and ere the fortnight was over, Frank held her to his heart and her struggles were over. She was content to nestle there quietly, and answered as he wished to the question, “And do you believe me at last, dear Katie?”

CHAPTER VII.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

A CLOUD has fallen upon the little shop in New Street. Stephen Walker is restless and anxious, for he feels that something is going wrong. Carry has changed so much during the last three months that he cannot but notice it. Her bright colour has quite gone now, and only comes back in sudden starts and flushes. Her manner, too, has altered even more than her appearance. She, who used to be so lively and gay, who was always humming scraps of song over her work, has now become silent and abstracted. If she noticed that her father was watching her she would break out in a burst of fitful merriment, talking and laughing in a forced, unnatural way, which was even more painful than her silence. Stephen Walker was a long time before he arrived reluctantly at the conclusion that

there was something wrong with Carry. At first he tried hard to persuade himself that the change existed only in his own imagination—that she was a little poorly, perhaps, nothing more; but at last he could no longer deceive himself, there was evidently something mentally, or physically, altogether wrong with her. Very sadly the old man pondered over the matter, and wearied himself with conjectures as to what could be the cause. She had no bodily ill, and quite repudiated any suggestion he made to that effect. She was perfectly well, she said, and Stephen Walker at last came to the conclusion it must be upon her mind. It was evident that nothing could make her unhappy except some love affair; and if so, with whom could Carry be in love? When this question was once fairly raised in Stephen Walker's mind he set himself to watch; but it was a long time after he did so before he came to any conclusion upon the subject, still longer before he could make up his mind to speak to her about it. One day, however, when he came into the shop after a short absence on business, he found the gentleman he suspected leaning on the counter talking confidentially with

Carry. At the sight of her father she started and coloured painfully, while the gentleman rose hastily, saying,—

“I have a holiday you see, Mr. Walker.”

Mr. Walker made some general answer and passed into the inner room. The gentleman left almost immediately; but Carry did not, as was her custom, come into the parlour, but remained in the shop all the afternoon. It was not until the shop was closed for the evening, and Carry had taken her work and sat down, that father and daughter were together alone. Even then Stephen Walker had difficulty in approaching the subject, for Carry seemed to feel instinctively what he wished to speak of, and endeavoured, by talking forcedly upon all sorts of topics, to keep him from approaching it. At last he took advantage of a momentary pause in her talk to begin.

“My dear Carry, you know very well that I love you dearly. I am a poor, nervous creature, my dear, but I cannot but see that you are not the same as you used to be.”

Carry, with a very pale face, laid down her work when her father commenced, and she now

interposed with a faint protest that she was quite well.

“My dear Carry, I am not quite sure that I would not rather know that you are not quite well. You may be, as you say, quite well bodily; that is, you may be free from any actual illness, but you are unquestionably changed, you are pale, and nervous, and out of spirits; it follows then that your illness must be mental. Now, my dear Carry, if you had a mother you would tell her, and she would advise you and talk to you as I cannot do. You are very unfortunately placed, dear—unfortunate in being so much alone, very unfortunate that the only person upon whom you can rely is a poor nervous man like myself. But do not think of this, Carry, only think that your old father loves you with all his heart, only think that your happiness is his only object in life, and open your heart to him, dear, as you would to a mother.”

Carry was crying now, kneeling at her father's knees.

“Can't you tell me, Carry?”

She shook her head.

“Perhaps I can guess, dear. I have noticed

for months how often Mr. Bingham comes here, and I have seen you change colour when he comes in. Is it he, Carry? Do you love him, my child?"

Carry was still crying, but after a pause she said, very low,

"I promised not to tell you, father, but as you have guessed, I can speak. But please, please, do not let him see that you know. Yes, father, I do love Mr. Bingham, and he loves me. He has told me so, but he does not want anyone to know it, because he has no money of his own, and we must wait. He has a very rich uncle, a Captain Bradshaw, who lives in Lowndes Square, and who is going to leave Mr. Bingham a great deal of money, but he dares not offend him by marrying. He is very old, so we are going to wait. But I promised not to tell you about it, father. Please do not let him know."

Stephen Walker was silent for a little time, and then said,

"I wish, Carry, I had known it before. I should have warned—no, not warned you, dear, but advised you against it before it was too late.

I do not like these long engagements, Carry. They seldom come to anything. I know the world better than you do, my child. I have not used my knowledge to much purpose as far as I myself am concerned, still I can see clearly enough in your case. I had rather it had been some young clerk, ay, Carry, or even an honest mechanic or small tradesman that had asked for you. Still, dear, I do not wish to blight your hopes, but do not build too much upon it; these things seldom come off."

"Oh, father," Carry said, "would you not like to see me a lady, in a house of my own, where you would always live with us, and have no more care and trouble? Oh, father, I have thought of that so much. And this, father, is quite, quite certain to come off."

"Yes, my child, we always think so, and the disappointment is in proportion to the hope. No, Carry, a long engagement is always bad; but when the parties are in different stations of life the chances of its being broken off are tenfold. However, Carry, we will hope for the best. But be careful, my child, you know nothing of the world. Do not encourage him to be here too

much. Neighbours will get to talk of it, and a good name is easily lost; and, although I know my little Carry too well not to be able to trust her as well, ay, and very much better, than myself, still, dear, you don't know the world and cannot be too careful. If you had only had a mother——”

And here Stephen Walker's warnings were put a stop to, for Carry's face, which had been bent down while he had been speaking, had become deadly white; her hand was pressed against her heart, and with a half sob, half cry, she leant forward; and her father, on stooping down, found that she was insensible. Very poignant were Stephen Walker's self-reproaches as he ran to get some water and endeavoured to bring her round.

“That is just like me,” he muttered to himself, “frightening the poor child, and telling her her love affair would come to nothing. As if I could not see that she worried enough about it without my making her worse. What an old fool I am, to be sure. And to think of her fainting, too—dear, dear.”

And so he wandered on, until, to his intense

relief, he saw her open her eyes. She looked round in a frightened way.

"There, there, my dear ; don't worry yourself, Carry. It is all right now. I have been wrong to frighten you, Carry, very wrong, and I have no doubt it will all come right. Why shouldn't it? A man who has once fallen in love with my Carry would not be likely to draw back. No, no, indeed. I thought I was talking wisdom, Carry, and I was an old fool after all."

Carry smiled feebly, and stroked her father's hair as he bent over her.

"I am better now, father, but I am not very strong. You are quite right in what you say, as you always are, dear, dear, old father. But oh, I wish, oh I wish you had spoken before." Then, after a pause, she said, "How foolish of me to faint! But I am better now. Kiss me, father, I will go up to bed."

After Carry had gone upstairs, Stephen Walker sat for a long time in the parlour. His thoughts were not pleasant.

"Poor child, poor child!" he said, "I would have given all the little I have in the world to have saved her this. Why did she not fall in

love with some one of her own station, some one who would have been proud of my bright, pretty Carry, who would have shown her to his friends with pleasure and pride? Carry would have been very happy in such a home as that. And now she must wait for years; and perhaps, after all, be deserted. For when the time comes friends will step in and dissuade him, and he will begin to think himself that he might choose a wife better suited to him than out of a tobacconist's shop. I hope he is not lying to her. He would, indeed, be a scoundrel who would lie to such an innocent child as Carry. But, at any rate, I will see if there is any Captain Bradshaw lives in Lowndes Square; and will find out, if I can, if he is really Mr. Bingham's uncle. If so, I shall feel more comfortable, and can wait. Perhaps, after waiting a bit, Carry too may get tired of it, and may not take it to heart if it is broken off at last. So, perhaps, no very great harm may come of it. But I am sorry, I am very sorry."

If Stephen Walker could have looked into the room where Carry was lying on the bed, crying passionately, he would have been even more sorry than he was. For the next two or three days

after this talk Stephen Walker was but little at home; for, having found out by a Directory Captain Bradshaw's address in Lowndes Square, he watched there for hours, until, on the third evening, he saw Fred Bingham enter. Having thus, found out that his story was true so far, he went home more satisfied.

There was another who was watching Carry as closely and as anxiously as did her father. She had been very restless lately, and had very often gone into Mrs. Holl's for a chat. Mrs. Holl was frequently out, and even when she was at home the conversation was principally between Carry and the cripple lad. To him Carry was as an angel of light. He almost worshipped her, and she knew it. Carry liked being admired, it was her nature; she turned as naturally for admiration as a flower for light. Besides, she pitied James. Had he been other than he was, a helpless cripple, Carry might have tossed her head a little loftily at the idea of an admirer who was an inmate of John Holl's cottage. As it was, she knew that his feeling had no idea of self in it, that it was as disinterested an attachment as that of a brother for a sister. Accordingly, she

was very kind to the poor lad; and, indeed, enjoyed a chat with him greatly. He had read so much, and his whole current of thought and his earnest talk were so different from anything she ever met with elsewhere, that she could have listened to him for hours with pleasure.

The cripple had noticed a change in Carry long before it had been visible to her father, almost before she had become conscious of it herself. At first it had been merely an occasional absent manner while talking to him, a kindling of the eye, a little flush of colour, as if she were thinking of some pleasant thing. Then James had sighed deeply, for he felt that she was in love. It was a pain to him to know that. He knew she could not be for him, he had never thought it. But as long as she remained as she was he had at least the pleasure of seeing her often, of knowing that she liked him very much, that she pitied him, and accepted the homage which he paid her. If she married, all this would be over. She would be no longer able to come to see him; the visits which were the great happiness of his life would cease, and in the love of a husband she would soon forget the poor cripple,

who would have gladly laid down his life to save her a pang. But, as time went on, the change in Carry had deepened and altered, and the lad saw that she was anxious and unhappy. James in vain tried to find some solution of this. The wax-flowers made but small progress, and the books on mathematics were laid aside. That Carry should love anyone and not be loved in return seemed to him impossible. She was so perfectly different from the few women he had ever seen that he thought every one must see Carry in the light of an exceptional being, as he did himself. What then could it be which could make her unhappy?

A few days after her conversation with her father Carry went into the Holls'. Mother was out, and the children were all away. Carry drew up a chair to the side of the cripple's table, and, after the first greeting, sat silently watching him as he worked. James broke the silence by putting down his work and saying suddenly,—

“Oh, Miss Carry, I do so grieve to see that you are not happy.”

“Not happy, James!” Carry said, starting from her reverie and colouring deeply; “not happy!

What makes you think such an extraordinary thing as that ? ”

“ There is no thinking about it, Miss Carry,” the boy said, sadly ; “ I am as sure of it as I am that I am sitting here. I have watched your face for so many years that I can read it as I can an open book. Oh, Miss Carry, I am miserable to see that you are sad, and that I can do nothing. Had I been like other men I might perhaps have made you happy. I would have made a place and a name for myself, and I would have loved you so much that you could not have helped loving me a little in return. But that was not to be. I am a cripple, and my love for you is as the love I might have for a dear sister. It is hard on me then, to know that you are not happy, and to be able to do nothing but sit here helpless, when I would so willingly give my life if it could do you good.”

Carry had sat pale and quiet while he was speaking. Then she took his hand, and said,

“ It is better as it is, James. I should never have made such a wife as you ought to have had. I have always known that you loved me, always, James, and as a brother I shall always love you.

But had you been a brother, had you been well and strong, you could have done no good here, James. But you must not think I am unhappy," she said, trying to speak cheerfully; "I am rather worried, but it will soon be over now, and then I shall be very happy. I will tell you then, James; you shall be one of the first to hear it. You will always love me, James, whatever comes, won't you?" she asked, wistfully, as she rose.

"Always, Carry, till I die."

"You will never judge me harshly, whatever people say, James?"

"Never, Carry; as God hears me, nothing will ever change me."

"Thank you, James," she said, "I believe you. God grant you may never be put to the test."

And then, leaning over him, she kissed him quietly, and without a word went out from the cottage.

The next morning Stephen Walker was in the shop with Carry when Fred Bingham came in for his paper, but he was busy arranging his books, and did not hear Carry's whispered sentence,

"At the old place, this evening at five." And then, as he seemed to hesitate, she added in such an agonised whisper, "You must, you must," that he nodded assent as he went out of the shop.

"I wonder what she wants," he said moodily to himself as he waited at the end of the street for an omnibus; "the same thing as usual, I suppose. Bah, I begin to think I have made a fool of myself."

At the appointed time Carry was walking restlessly backwards and forwards in a retired part of Kensington Gardens. There the trees grew thick and close, and through them the Long water could be seen, with groups of children playing about and throwing food to the waterfowl. Away to the right the band was playing, and through the vista of the trees crowds of fashionably-dressed people could be seen moving slowly to and fro. For some time no one came near the solitary, restless figure. At last a man approached, whom she recognised as far as she could see him. Then she stopped walking and leaned against a tree, with her hand pressed upon her heart as if to still its beating.

"You're early, Carry. It wants five minutes to the hour. Is anything the matter?"

"Oh, Fred," the girl panted out. "Father begins to suspect something; he has been asking me questions about you, and he sees I am ill. Oh, Fred, keep your promise to me. You know you swore it, swore it on the Bible. You said that if your uncle lived, so that you could not marry me publicly, you would marry me privately in a month. It is three months now, Fred. Oh, dear, dear Fred, don't put me off any longer!"

"No, Carry, I will not; but you see I have not been able to arrange matters. You see I never thought the old man would have held on so long, and then we could have done it publicly; but, as it is, I will see about getting it done privately."

"You are not deceiving me, Fred? You have disappointed me so often. Oh, Fred! if it is found out, what shall I do, what shall I do? I would much rather die—oh, how much rather. Oh, Fred! marry me in some out of the way chapel, anywhere. I swear to you that I will never tell anyone but father till you give me leave, and we will go away and live anywhere, so that

it can never be found out. Only marry me, Fred, so that I may be able to tell him I am a wife. If not, it will kill him! Oh, Fred! dear, dear Fred, have pity upon me!"

"Now, my dear Carry, don't be unreasonable. You know how fond I am of you, and you may be sure that I will keep my word and make it all right. There, I promise you I will see about it at once, and in a few days I will write and tell you what the arrangements are. It is no use your fretting so, Carry, you only make yourself pale and ill."

"I try not to, Fred; but oh, I am so, so miserable. I have to try to talk and laugh, and to seem careless and happy, when God knows I am wishing I was dead. I am obliged to listen and smile when my father talks to me, and when every kind word hurts me so that I can hardly help screaming out. I shall go mad, Fred, if it goes on much longer. You have disappointed me week after week, and month after month; and though I know so well how you love me, and that you are only detained for a while from marrying me, still I can't help being very miserable. But you will not this time, will you? You

won't put me off any more?" she said pleadingly.

"No, no, Carry, I mean what I say. But you don't make allowance enough for me. I am so harassed, and I have so much to do, and have been disappointed in—but there, it will all be right now, and before very long you shall hear from me. I am going into the country on business, but will make all my arrangements for the affair to come off as soon as I get back. There, good-bye, Carry, do not fret, child, it will be all right soon."

So he kissed her and walked off hastily before she could say anything more. When he looked round and saw that she was going away in the opposite direction, he sat down on a bench by the water, and, picking up some small stones, threw them viciously at the ducks who swam up to his feet for crumbs. "It is a great annoyance," he said, "and the deuce of it is the worst has not come yet. I have a good mind to take her to some out of the way place and get married and send her away, as she proposes, into the country, where I could run down and see her sometimes. I have no doubt she would live

quietly enough for years, and her old fool of a father with her. The betting is ten to one it would never come out, and would be pleasant enough. But then it is a nasty risk. Bigamy does not sound well—case of imprisonment. Still it might be managed somehow, of course after the other. I might get some one to manage it—get some fellow to act as a registrar, and do a civil marriage.” And he laughed unpleasantly as he hit a duck upon the head. “It’s lucky her old father is such an arrant idiot. But there, I can think it over while I am away. I shan’t be gone more than a fortnight, and I will carry out this little drama somehow a day or two after I get back. I know a billiard marker who would do well enough, and then all I have got to do is to get them away from that den into the country. She will never know of the other affair. They know no one, and she never reads the papers. At any rate it need not come out for years. Still it is rather a nuisance altogether. Take that, you little brute.”

The last observation was addressed to a child who had bowled his hoop against the speaker’s legs. Fred Bingham accompanied the words by

taking the hoop and throwing it far out into the middle of the Long water ; and then, with his unpleasant laugh, he strolled off, pursued by the loud roaring of the child and the indignant scoldings and threatenings of its nurse.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN THE "TIMES."

CAPTAIN BRADSHAW had not at first received the news which Frank, on his return from his second visit to Staffordshire, had given him of his engagement, with equanimity. Although he had outwardly resigned himself to the failure of his favourite plan, he had never quite given up hope that some day or other matters might come right. Frank's engagement put an end to all this, and he could hardly conceal his disappointment. Frank had, however, anticipated something of this, and passed over the scarcely veiled ill-humour with which his uncle had greeted the announcement that he was engaged to a young lady down in Staffordshire. Frank had turned to Alice, secure that there at least he should find a sympathising listener; and although Alice had spoken but

little at first, she presently became as interested as Frank could have wished, and asked very many questions as to her future cousin.

"And what may Miss O'Byrne's fortune be, Frank?" Captain Bradshaw asked, rather grimly.

"Her face is her fortune, sir, she said," Frank laughed.

"I thought so," Captain Bradshaw said. "That is just like you, Frank—I could have sworn it. The present generation are going to the deuce, I think. I married well, so did my father, and my grandfather, and so on as far back as history tells us anything about it. Here you are—a good-looking fellow, with every advantage—marrying a young lady, of whom I will accept your description as to her personal advantages, but altogether, as I understand you, without fortune."

"It's very sad, uncle," Frank said with comic humility, "but you see we can't get all our wants. If Katie had been worth ten thousand a year, perhaps she would have been married a year ago."

"I don't think money has much to do with happiness," Alice said.

"Pooh, nonsense, stuff," Captain Bradshaw said irritably. "What do you know about it, Alice?"

Alice had no answer ready, and, after a short pause, Captain Bradshaw went on—

"There, Frank, I don't want to damp your ardour. I don't like it, and it's no use pretending I do; but I dare say I shall like your Kate very much when I see her, so you had better tell her to make up her mind to like me. You have been very troublesome lately, Frank, but I wish you every happiness, my boy."

And so time had gone on, the four months the engagement lasted had passed, and Frank went down to be married, taking Prescott with him, to support him upon that arduous occasion.

It was three days later that Alice saluted her uncle on his coming down to breakfast with,

"There is an announcement in the 'Times' of to-day which will astonish you, uncle."

"What is it, Alice?"

"Well, to begin with, uncle, here's Frank's

marriage in—not that that is astonishing. But what do you think of the one under it? ‘On Wednesday, at St. Peter’s, Manchester, Frederick Bingham, of Hans Place, London, to Margaret, only daughter of the late Charles Farrer, Esq., of Oldham.’ ”

“Nonsense, Alice, you are joking.”

“It is a fact, uncle; here is the paper, look for yourself.”

“What the deuce does he mean by it, Alice? How dare he marry without speaking to me first?”

“I don’t know, I am sure, uncle, it seems strange, but there is a letter on the table for you, and I think it is in his handwriting.”

Captain Bradshaw opened the letter.

“Yes, it is from him.”

“MY DEAR UNCLE,—

You will, I am sure, be surprised at the news that I am married. Indeed, I am almost surprised myself. It has indeed been rather a sudden affair at the end, although I have been attached to the young lady for a considerable time.” (Captain Bradshaw did not notice the

little look of amused contempt upon his niece's face.) "I should have spoken to you on the subject, but I hate fuss, and I think one marriage in a family is quite enough at a time. I did not, therefore, wish to bore you with my domestic affairs. You will, I feel sure, uncle, excuse any apparent disrespect in my not mentioning the matter to you, but I did not even tell my father until two days ago. My wife is just twenty-one years of age, is pretty, at least I suppose I ought to think so, and has a snug little fortune, which, to a man fighting his way in life, is of importance; and I cannot, like my cousin Frank, afford to be romantic. I trust, my dear uncle, that when I inform you of the particulars, and present my wife to you, you will approve of the step I have taken.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"FRED BINGHAM."

"He is a strange young fellow, Alice. Never does anything like anyone else. It is just as well though; as he says, two marriages on the cards would have been rather overpowering."

"It is all a matter of opinion, uncle. I

should not like a husband of mine to marry me in that sort of way, as if he were ashamed of the whole affair."

"I don't suppose he's ashamed, Alice. I am afraid though, very much afraid by the name, Oldham you see, that he has married into the cotton mills. It doesn't matter much in his case. He's a railway contractor, and I suppose not particular. Had it been Frank, it would have been a serious matter. I shouldn't like to think of a cotton spinner's daughter at Wyvern Hall. As it is, her money—you see he says she has a snug fortune—will be very useful to him. There's no romance about Fred."

"I should think not," Alice said scornfully.

"No," her uncle went on, unheeding the tone, "not a bit. He's wide awake, is Master Fred. You see she's no father, is just twenty-one, and he married her suddenly. I shouldn't be at all surprised," and he laughed, "if there was no time to have settlements drawn out."

"Oh, uncle," Alice said impetuously, "how can you laugh? to me all this is shocking."

"Well, my dear, frankly it's not nice; and as I said, if Fred were going to have Wyvern Hall, I

shouldn't like it at all. Still, Alice, I think you are inclined to be a little too hard upon Fred. He is a shrewd man of the world, no doubt, but you see you don't know anything about men of the world, and so these things go a little against your grain. I like Fred Bingham very much; he's a pleasant, amiable, chatty young fellow, although he has not been brought up, so to speak, in the traditions of a gentleman. I like him, but I don't do more. I shall, of course, leave him some money when I die, but I confess I should never really care for him as I do for Frank, with all his headstrong ways and the annoyance he has given me."

Alice felt pleased.

"Thank you, uncle. There is, in my opinion, no more comparison between my two cousins than between light and dark."

"Yes, Alice, I know your opinions on the subject, but as I said, you are not an impartial judge. Women never are when it is between a man of birth who has a fortune and no work to do, and one who has to fight his way."

"But, my dear uncle; my cousins are equally well born, and equally well educated; I do not

see why there should be any difference between them."

"Yes, my dear, there is a very great difference," Captain Bradshaw said positively. "Frank was brought up with the idea that he should never have to work for his living. Therefore he has no notion whatever of business, is romantic in his ideas, would not do a mean thing to save his life, and refused, even at the risk of losing my favour, to do as I wanted him—in fact, is a gentleman. Fred has been brought up in a different school. He was educated at some private school or other; his father is, I have always heard—for I never saw the man, and never want to—is a sharp man of business, and married my silly sister for her money, and Fred has had it instilled into him that money-making is the great end of life. He is a good-tempered, off-hand young fellow, and this has not done him so much harm as it would do most lads. He has been to college, certainly, but that has not done him as much good as it should have done. He has turned out a man of the world, and as such, though I like him very well, I could never love him as I do Frank. You see the difference of their marriages. Frank marries a

little Irish girl without a halfpenny. She, I have no doubt, to use his own expression, a most loveable little woman; and he is as proud of his marriage as if he had made the best match conceivable. Fred, on the other hand, without a tithe of Frank's natural advantages, marries a girl with a fortune, and without a father to look after her. I shall be interested, Alice, in watching the different way in which the young couples will go on."

"I know which will be the happiest, uncle."

"You think you know, Alice, because you have not got rid of your romance yet. From what I know of my two nephews, I should say they would both make very good husbands in a different sort of way."

Alice dissented very strongly from her uncle, but as she could not have said so without adducing reasons which would have shaken what belief her uncle had in Fred Bingham, which she was determined not to do, she was silent.

CHAPTER IX.

GONE.

CARRY was in unusually low spirits. She had that morning received a letter from Fred Bingham, written from the country. In it he told her that he feared he should be detained three weeks, but that he would make arrangements for the marriage to take place immediately he returned; but that it must be done quietly before a registrar. Carry quite believed that it would be as he said, still she was sick and low at the thought that another month of this wearying deception and secrecy must take place. After the shop was closed for the night, she took a piece of work as usual, but finding that it was in vain to endeavour to keep her attention fixed, and that now and then a tear would fall upon it, she put her work down and took up the "Times," not for the sake of reading it, but to screen her face from her father.

Stephen Walker was smoking his pipe quietly, and was thinking sadly to himself how greatly Carry had changed in the three months, when he was startled by a sharp cry of pain from her, and looking up saw the paper fall from her hands. She had risen to her feet, her eyes stared wildly, and her face was deadly pale. For a moment she stood immovable, then she tottered, and with a low gasping cry sank back upon the seat, and Stephen Walker was just in time to support her as she fainted. Terribly alarmed at this sudden attack, her father laid her upon the little sofa, and hurried to fetch water to sprinkle her forehead, but it was a long time before there were any signs of returning animation. Then she opened her eyes and looked round wildly, then with a shuddering sigh closed them again, and remained for some time without speaking. At last, in answer to her father's earnest entreaties to speak, she rose into a sitting position, and said, faintly,—

“I am better again now, father ; I will go up to bed.”

She was so weak, however, that she had to accept her father's assistance, and having seen

her to her door, the old man returned sadly downstairs.

"Poor child, poor child!" he said to himself, as he sat down again and mechanically refilled his pipe, "what a change! She is evidently unhappy, evidently begins to doubt him already. I am afraid he is a rascal; if so, the sooner she knows it the better. What ought I to do?" and he thought deeply for a while. "Yes, that is the only plan; next time he comes I will follow him out and talk to him myself. I will tell him that I can see that he is here too often for Carry's peace of mind. I will ask him as a man to keep away altogether if he is only playing with my child's affections. If he repeats to me what he has told her, I will ask him at any rate to stay away until he is in a position to make her his wife. In the meantime, if I could but get her away from him, the change would strengthen her. "Why should I not?" he went on more briskly. "I have two or three hundred pounds at the bank, why should I not put some one in charge of the shop and go away for a month to the sea-side? It would be the very thing for her. Yes, yes, if I had Carry all to myself at the sea-

side, I should soon get her round again. I wish I had thought of it before. I will see about getting some one to-morrow. I will take Carry to a doctor, too; he shall give her some tonics."

Stephen Walker went up to bed and felt quite relieved at the thoughts of his plans for Carry's benefit. He woke up, however, in the night with a vague idea that some one had been kissing and crying over him. As he fairly roused himself and sat up, he fancied he heard his door close softly, but was not sure that it was not imagination. He spoke, and there was no answer, and after a thought of the pleasant surprise he had in store for Carry in the morning, he fell asleep again. In the morning when Stephen Walker came downstairs he found that, contrary to custom, he was the first up.

"Poor child," he said to himself, "she is tired, I dare say, after fainting last night. Well, a good long sleep will do her good," and so Stephen Walker bustled about, folded the newspapers, and served the customers, sending round Tom Holl before he started on his rounds, to ask his mother to come in for half-an-hour, if she

could spare time. Mrs. Holl soon came round, laid and lit the fire, and prepared breakfast. It was by this time half-past nine, and the regular customers were all served.

"Now, Mrs. Holl, I will go up and call Carry. How astonished she will be when I tell her its half-past nine, and breakfast's ready!"

Stephen Walker was away two or three minutes and then returned, looking white and scared. He sat down in a chair, trembling in every limb.

"What is the matter, Mr. Walker?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Holl; I have knocked, and knocked, and I cannot make her hear."

"I dare say she's sleeping sound," Mrs. Holl said; "she's not been looking well of late; shall I go up and wake her?"

Stephen Walker made a gesture of assent, and Mrs. Holl went upstairs to Carry's room. She knocked at first gently, and then more loudly. There was no answer. Mrs. Holl was not a nervous woman, but she felt frightened—she did not know of what. The fear of Stephen Walker had infected her, and this strange silence made her as timid as he had been. She tried the handle to see if the door was locked. It was

not; the door yielded to her touch, but it was with a nervous trembling that Mrs. Holl pushed the door open, and entered. What she had expected to see—what she was afraid of—she knew not, but no sight could have affected her so much, not even the sight of the girl dead in her bed, as did that deserted room, that unused bed, that letter lying upon the table. Mrs. Holl saw the truth at once, and as she thought of Carry, thought of the old man downstairs, she sat down, and began to cry. Presently she heard a step on the stairs. What should she say? how should she break it to him? She hurried out and met him outside the door.

“Don’t go in, don’t go in; come downstairs, and I will tell you all about it.”

“Is she ——?”

He did not finish the question—indeed he had scarcely uttered the words, but Mrs. Holl guessed them by the movement of his lips.

“No, she’s not dead; she’s not, indeed. Please, go down ——”

But Stephen Walker pushed past her, and stood in the empty room. A low cry broke from him, then his eye caught the letter on the table;

it was addressed to himself. He could not stand to read it; he sank down in a chair. He opened the letter with trembling hands, but the trembling ceased, and his figure seemed to stiffen into stone as he read on—

“Father, father, what can I say to you—how can I write it? He has married another; I saw it in the paper this evening; yet he promised, promised over and over again to marry me. Only this morning I had a letter from him saying he would marry me in three weeks, and when he was writing it he must have been married already. I leave his letter that you may see that I spoke truly when I said he promised to marry me, and oh, father, I believed him so; I thought him true and honourable, and oh, father, forgive me, forgive me, for I have disgraced you. I cannot live, father, I cannot live with this shame. When you receive this, Carry and her sins will be over. Oh, father, forgive me. I know you will, and then God will forgive, too. I have suffered so much, surely He will have pity on me. Father, do not think of me as I have been for the last month. Try and think that I died young; think of me as the little Carry who loved you so, so

much, and never remember the miserable girl who has brought shame upon herself and you."

Mrs. Holl was frightened at the ghastly pallor and the set rigid expression which grew upon the old man's face as he read on. There he sat still and immovable. When he had finished, his lips were livid, and his eyes fixed.

"Don't take on so, now don't, there's a good creature," Mrs. Holl said, soothingly; "she will come back again safe enough; don't take on so."

But Mrs. Holl's words were addressed to deaf ears, and seeing that he paid no attention to her, she came close to him and touched him. Then a sharp contraction passed over his face, and in another moment he lay on the ground in a violent fit. Mrs. Holl was a strong woman, and accustomed to hard work, but it needed all her strength to hold the old man during the first paroxysm of the attack. She was unwilling to call for assistance, as she wished to hide what had happened from the neighbours until, at any rate, she knew what the father might determine upon doing. When she saw that the paroxysm was over, the kind hearted woman, wishing to spare him the sight of his daughter's empty room, took

the still insensible man up in her strong arms and carried him down to the parlour. Presently he opened his eyes, then putting his hand over his face, remained immovable.

"Please put up the shutters, and close the shop," he said at length.

Mrs. Holl hesitated.

"I wouldn't do that, Mr. Walker, not if I were you; it would tell all the neighbours something wrong had taken place. If you bear up, and give out she's gone away on a visit, no one will be any the wiser, when she comes back, which she's sure to do sooner or later; and you may be sure I would bite my tongue out before I would speak a word. You must not be hard on her, Mr. Walker. Poor young thing, she has had no mother to advise her right, and young girls, if they aint looked after, are as certain to go wrong as a horse is to go to water. You won't be hard on her now, Mr. Walker; you'll forgive her when she comes back?" Mrs. Holl said pleadingly.

"She will never come back," the old man said hoarsely, "never. He has married some one else, and she could not bear the disgrace. She is dead now."

Mrs. Holl sat down in sudden horror. She had not for a moment suspected this. She had only thought that Carry had eloped with some one, and that the letter was to tell her father of it and to beg for forgiveness. This was too dreadful, and as Mrs. Holl thought of the girl she had known so long and seen so lately, now lying dead, or perhaps being swept along by the cold river, she put her apron over her head and cried unrestrainedly. Stephen Walker shed no tears. He sat immovable, crushed and hopeless. When Mrs. Holl recovered, she went outside and put up the shutters, and then closing the door, went back into the parlour.

"Don't take on so, there's a dearie; let me pour you out a little tea. You must not give way. If it is true, poor child, she's happy now. Whatever has happened, she was as good a girl as ever lived, and if she has sinned, she has suffered." The old man did not seem to hear that he was spoken to; and Mrs. Holl, feeling powerless before this great grief, prepared to leave him to himself. First, however, she reached down a Bible from the shelf, and placed it before him. Then she said, "I will come in

again this afternoon and see if I can do anything for you. Keep your heart up, there's a dearie; do try and think she was always a good girl, and that she is happy now, and please try and read the good book; I've heard them say in church that it binds up the bleeding heart."

As Mrs. Holl turned to leave, Mr. Walker roused himself a little, "Thank you," he said, faintly; "Thank you, you are very good; will you send the Policeman, the one I have met at your house, here? I want him to search—," and here he stopped. But Mrs. Holl understood him; he wanted him to search for the body, and with a nod of assent, for she could not speak, she turned and left him to his great sorrow.

Mrs. Holl hurried home, and then sitting down before the fire, and covering her head again with her apron, she gave way to a great fit of crying, to the astonishment and alarm of the cripple lad who was the only inmate of the house.

"What is the matter, mother! what is the matter? Is anything wrong with father or the children?"

Mrs. Holl shook her head, but continued to

cry, silently rocking herself backwards and forwards in her chair.

The cripple hastily wheeled his box to her side. "What is it, mother? you frighten me."

"Oh James!" she sobbed, finding words at last; "Carry Walker, poor girl!"

"Yes mother, yes; what of her?" the cripple panted out.

"She has been deceived, my boy, by some villain, and has drowned herself."

The cripple gave a cry as of sharp pain. His mother looked round, and read his secret in his face.

"Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy!" she cried, kneeling by his box, and putting her arm round him. "To think of this. But it could not have been, James; she never could have been for you. Don't take on, my poor lad."

"Oh mother, I never thought it!" he cried; "I never thought it; but I loved her so, loved her with all my life, and to think—oh Carry, Carry!" he broke out wildly; "oh that I who loved you so, was helpless to protect you! oh that I must sit here and be able to do nothing to avenge you—to think that you, so good, so kind,

so gentle, are gone—oh mother, mother! I shall go mad!”

In vain Mrs. Holl endeavoured to calm the lad; his wild excitement, his grief, and his sense of helplessness, turned his brain; hour after hour he raved, and before night was in a state of raging fever. Mrs. Holl sent a neighbour off for a doctor, who ordered his hair to be cut off, and ice to be placed on his temples, but for the next few days his life was despaired of, and John was obliged to stay at home to assist Sarah with the delirious lad, and enable her to slip away for half an hour three times a day to the broken-hearted old man in New Street.

CHAPTER X.

WHO WAS IT?

THE shop in New Street is shut up, and has been so for the last ten days. Two days after Carry's disappearance, an enterprising young rival a few doors off made an arrangement through Mrs. Holl with Stephen Walker, to take the business off his hands, and to supply his customers with newspapers. There was an hour's bustle as the books and stock were taken across the road in a hand cart, and then the shutters were put up, a notice affixed stating that the business was transferred to No. 27 over the way, and Stephen Walker remained alone by his deserted hearth. Great was the excitement and talk in New Street upon those first few days. Not a little was the matter discussed upon the top of the Brompton 'busses by the young clerks who had so long bought their morning papers and

tobacco at the shop of Stephen Walker, when they first heard of the reason of its sudden closing, at the new establishment at No. 27. For a few days indeed the matter was talked over almost to the exclusion of every other topic. Men's comments upon an affair of this sort are very different from those of women. Women discuss it quite theoretically. Comparatively few women ever are greatly tempted, and they can therefore neither understand nor make allowance for those who are so tried. Their blame thus falls almost wholly upon the woman. Upon her they are pitiless. She becomes as one who is dead, and her name is no more to be spoken by pure lips. To the man they are very lenient. There may be a little coolness, but it soon passes over, and in a short time they will again feast him at their tables, and offer him their lambs in marriage. Men, upon the other hand, reason from what they know. In these matters they live altogether in a different atmosphere to that which women inhabit. They can understand the old sad story of temptation and weakness, of loving trust, and broken promises, and their censure falls wholly upon the man. There was

no word of blame for poor Carry on the lips of those by whom the matter was discussed upon the top of the Brompton 'busses. For her there was pity and even sorrow; while had his name been known, he would have fared but badly at the hands of more than one of the young fellows who had once hoped to win the pretty tobacco-nist's daughter for their wife.

In the meantime Stephen Walker sat alone in the little parlour behind the empty shop, like one stunned, crouching silently by the fire;—for although the autumn sun shone warm and bright, he was chilled to the bone: so he sat from morning to night. He seldom moved; he never spoke; he hardly even thought. He sat there in an apathy of despair. Everything around remained as it had been left. There was Carry's workbox. There in the window hung her bird-cage, with the canary, to which she would chirrup and sing, and which would reply in such loud jubilant carollings; but the bird, missing its mistress's presence and attention, had ceased to sing, and sat silent upon its perch, a mere ball of rough disordered yellow feathers. There at his feet was the stool upon which Carry was

so fond of sitting. Everything reminded him of her, but yet he could hardly think of the past. He was too utterly crushed and hopeless to rouse himself into active thought, but sat there hour after hour and day after day, with the one despairing cry,—where was she, where was she? That question to which no answer came.

Many of the neighbours would have gladly done any kind offices for the old man in his trouble, but he would admit two only. One was Mrs. Holl, who brought him in his meals, and stopped to see him eat them—which he would not otherwise have done—talking to him in the meantime, and trying, as she said, to comfort him up a bit. The talking, however, was all upon her side, for Stephen Walker sat as if he did not hear her, as if he was scarcely aware that she was in the room. His only other visitor was A 56. These interviews were not long ones. As the Policeman entered Stephen Walker would look up with blood-shot eyes, and trembling lips, which could hardly frame the words, “No news?” and would pause with almost more of fear than of hope for an answer. But day after

day A 56, with his usually set face softened before this great sorrow, could only shake his head. "No news to-day, Mr. Walker, and no news, you know, is good news;" and then, after a few more cheery words which the bent-down figure before him seemed not to hear, the Policeman would turn quietly, and go off to his duty. But one day the Policeman's step was less firm than usual, and his face was very grave and serious. Almost before he entered the room Stephen Walker felt instinctively that this time there was something to tell. He rose from his chair, made a step forward, leaned one hand upon the table for support, and held the other before him as if to ward off a blow.

"What is it?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"Now don't you go and distress yourself, Mr. Walker," the Policeman said, soothingly. "Don't you flurry yourself. There aint nothing certain, nothing at all. It is just this, it may be, or it may not be, more likely, not. If it weren't that I had promised to let you know directly I heard of anything which might, so to say, bear upon it, I wouldn't have spoken to you at all about it; leastways not till I had been down myself and

seen about it. Yes, I am coming to it," he said, answering the appealing look of the old man; "Yes, but don't you frighten yourself; it may not turn out as you are afraid, not at all. Well, according as you asked me, I sent round to all the Police Stations down the river, but I have heard of nothing that seemed at all likely, not till this morning. But this morning I got word—now don't you frighten yourself, Mr. Walker, it may not have, and I don't suppose it has anything to do with us at all—but this morning I got word that down Gravesend way they have picked something up. There is nothing whatever to identify it by, but it seems, they say, to have been a young woman, and fair. That's all I've heard."

Stephen Walker did not speak, but motioned with his hand towards his hat.

"Yes, we'll go, Mr. Walker, but just sit down a few minutes first," the Policeman said, soothingly. "You had better take a nip of something before you start. If you haven't got it in the house, I'll fetch it for you."

Stephen Walker sank down into his chair again, and pointed to a cupboard, saying, "Brandy."

The Policeman opened it, took out a bottle of brandy, and poured a glassful into a tumbler, added a little water to it, and gave it to the old man. "There, Mr. Walker, drink that down." Then the Policeman mixed a glass for himself; for, accustomed as he was to scenes of suffering, and misery, he felt nervous at the thought of the scene he had to go through.

Stephen Walker drank the brandy, holding the tumbler to his lips with both his trembling hands. When he had finished it, the Policeman said, "Now, Mr. Walker, we will start if you like. I've got leave off duty to go down with you, and I've got a cab at the door. You take my arm, sir. That's right," and so they went out and got into the cab.

During the drive to London Bridge not a word was spoken. Upon the journey by rail down to Gravesend, the Policeman spoke two or three times to his companion, but received no answer, and did not even know whether he was heard. Stephen Walker sat in a stupor of despondency and dread, from which the Policeman had to touch him to arouse him upon arriving at their journey's end. Outside the Station A 56 again

took a cab, for Stephen Walker had scarcely strength to stand. They were soon at the Police Office.

“I will go in first, Mr. Walker, you sit here for a minute or two; it may be that I may be able at once to tell you that it is not as you fear, and thus you will be saved the pain of such a sight.”

Stephen Walker made a gesture of assent, he was too sick and faint with dread to speak.

The Policeman was away about three minutes, which seemed an age to the watcher in the cab. Then he came again to the door. Stephen Walker gazed at the grave face as if to read his sentence there. “I can tell you nothing, sir, it has been ten days in the water, and ten days in the Thames alters one beyond all knowing. I have asked about the clothes, and there were none on to speak of, and the marks have been torn off what there were, either before on purpose, or accidentally, it looks as if on purpose. You will not know more than I do when you see it, but I suppose you had better, though it is a pitiful sight.” He opened the door as he spoke, and

assisted Stephen Walker to get out. The old man followed him into the station-house with a firmer step; it was a relief at any rate that it was not certain that it was she. Besides, the very extent of his dread took away all hesitation or nervousness. There were two or three policemen in the office which they passed through. An inspector was sitting in a sort of railed off den writing, the others were standing about talking in a low voice. They ceased speaking as Stephen Walker passed through with his conductor. A 56 paused for a moment to take up a tumbler of water which had been placed in readiness, and then, accompanied by the inspector, led the way through the office into a yard, in one corner of which was a small outhouse. A policeman was standing at the door; he opened it and they passed into a small room, bare and white-washed, with a brick paving. The shed was unceiled, and the roof was of slates supported by light rafters. Opposite the door upon some boards and tressels, and covered with a sheet, lay the body of the dead girl. A 56 closed the door, and the inspector moved forward to turn down the sheet from her face. But Stephen

Walker motioned him back, and with a steady step approached. His face was hard set; he was strung up to a point now, when even the dreadful spectacle which met his gaze, and which few strong men could have viewed without shuddering and turning faint, had no effect on him. He looked steadily at it, every thought was absorbed by the question, "Had it been Carry?" He could not say. No one could say now. It was past all recognition. Only the hair remained intact, and although it was fair and long, even that was changed; the sheen and the glossy brightness were gone, and in the tangled skein were pieces of straw and wood and river drift. Even the hair was scarcely a guide. He took it in his hands, as if he would fain tell by touch whether it was the same hair he had so often tenderly stroked and played with. A thousand memories rushed upon him as he did so, the golden haired child who had climbed upon his knee and stroked his face and called him daddy, the bright merry girl whose laugh had cheered him in his darkest days, the graceful woman he had been so proud and fond of; and then a mist swam before his eyes, the room reeled round,

and he felt himself grasped by the strong arms of the inspector and A 56. When he recovered he was lying upon a bed, and the inspector and policeman were standing by him. His shirt was open and wet, and a glass of brandy was upon a table near. As soon as they saw that he was reviving they raised him up, and held the spirits to his lips. In a few minutes he was able to sit up.

"Do you feel better now, sir ? "

"Yes," he said, "I am better now." In a short time he was able to walk.

"Before you go, sir," the inspector said, "I must ask you if you identify the body you have seen as being that of your daughter ? "

"I do not," Stephen Walker said firmly. "It may be ; I do not know ; God alone can answer. Her hair is of the same colour, but that is not sufficient for me to say. Please put down that I do not identify the body." This denial upon Stephen Walker's part was in obedience to a suggestion which A 56 had thrown out upon their way down. This, although he had at the time made no reply, and had not apparently even heard it, now recurred to him. The Policeman had said,—

"Unless you are sure, Mr. Walker, quite sure, don't swear to it, else the name might get into the paper, and be put into the registries, and come out at the coroner's inquest, and all sorts of painful inquiries would be made. Don't you identify, Mr. Walker, unless you are quite certain."

"At the same time," Stephen Walker continued to the inspector, "although I do not recognise the body, it is possible that it may be hers, and I should wish to pay the funeral expenses. I should not like her to lie in a parish grave."

"The coroner and jury will see it this afternoon," the inspector said, quite understanding Stephen Walker's feelings, "and I will tell them that the body is not identified. Of course an open verdict will be found, and I will speak to the parish people ; they will offer no objection to the expenses being saved. I shall go off duty this afternoon myself, and if you like, sir, will make all the necessary arrangements for you. The funeral must take place to-morrow morning."

"Thank you very much," Stephen Walker said, "you are very good. I will be down here at ten o'clock."

CHAPTER XI.

STEPHEN WALKER DOES HIS WORST.

ON the return journey from Gravesend, the Policeman could not but remark that a great change had taken place in his companion. It was not that he spoke more than he had done before, for he did not exchange a single word with him; but the whole expression of his face, and even of his figure, had changed. On his way down he had cowered in a corner, his face generally buried in his hands; when he had looked up it was with an expression of utter hopelessness, mingled with a certain anxious dread; his fingers had twitched nervously, he clasped and unclasped his hands, and rocked his body to and fro. Now, all this was changed. He was another man. He sat upright, almost stiffly so. There was a patch of colour in each cheek, his face was set and hard, his lips pressed closely together, he seemed un-

conscious of where he was, but looked straight in the distance. His hands no longer lay nerveless, but were tightly compressed in a fierce clench. Sometimes his lips moved, but his companion could not hear that he spoke. People got in and out at the various stations, but Stephen Walker never noticed them, and was unconscious of their presence, much less of the curiosity and comment of which he was the subject. His appearance was far too wild and strange, not to be instantly remarked, and this, coupled with the fact of the Policeman being seated opposite to him, awakened great suspicion, not to say alarm. One or two people whispered to A 56, to inquire if it was a case of murder; and one old lady expressed her opinion audibly, that "it was shameful taking such a character as that in a railway-carriage without so much as a handcuff on." The Policeman, not being able to enter into explanations, answered only by a general nod, as much as to show he knew what he was about, and then tapped his forehead mysteriously. This had the effect he desired of inducing a belief that Stephen Walker was an escaped lunatic, and of clearing the carriage of its occupants at the next

station. Complaints were evidently made to the guard of the train on the subject, for just before it moved on, he came to the window, and exchanged a few words with the Policeman. Being informed of the real state of the case, he said, "poor old gentleman!" in a tone of great sympathy, and locked the carriage-door, so that no other passenger got in until the end of the journey.

A 56's own impression for a while was that Stephen Walker's brain had given way under the crushing blow he had suffered. This demeanour was so utterly unlike the ordinary nervousness of the man that the Policeman watched with some anxiety to see that his companion made no sudden movement to open the door and leap out when the train was in full motion. After a time he abandoned this idea. There was none of the changing light of insanity in Stephen Walker's eye. There was an air of stern determination about him, which the Policeman felt boded ill for some one.

The return journey passed without a word being exchanged; and not, indeed, until they got out of the cab at New Street, was the silence

broken. Then Stephen Walker turned to the Policeman—

“Thank you very much for what you have done for me. To-morrow I shall go down to the funeral of my child, for although as you advised, I declined to identify her, I have no doubt it is her. To-night I have other things to do.”

The Policeman did not turn off at the door, as Stephen Walker evidently expected and wished him to do, but followed him into the house.

“Excuse me, Mr. Walker, excuse what I am going to say, but from what I have seen of you on the way up, I am afraid you are going to do something rash. Now, don’t you go to do it, sir. I ain’t talking as a policeman now, I am talking as a man. Don’t make matters worse by doing anything rash. I know what you are thinking of—you are thinking of him. He’s a bad un, whoever he is; and hanging would be too good for him; but don’t you touch him, sir. Think it over—don’t do anything rash.”

“You think I am going to kill him?” Stephen Walker asked.

“I don’t think, and I don’t want to know,” the

Policeman said. "I am your friend now, and am off duty; I may have my own opinion as to what would serve him right, but don't tell me. They know I've been down with you, and I don't want to have to answer awkward questions. I only say to you, as a friend now, think it over,—don't do anything rash. It can't set things right and it will only cause trouble. Don't you think of it, Mr. Walker."

"I am not thinking of it," Stephen Walker said. "If I were younger I should. I am an old man now, and a feeble one, although I don't feel feeble at present. No, I do not think of killing him. If I knew I could I would; ay, as truly as I stand here; but I am nervous and feeble, and I might fail, and then he would escape to enjoy the triumph of another victim. No, I will strike him with a surer hand than that. Thank God, I know who he is, and I think and hope I can ruin him; upset all his hopes and plans, and embitter his life; and I will do it. You look surprised, Policeman, and well you may. He thought Carry had no friends—no protector; and well he might. I was a feeble, nervous old man. I could not save her, but I am not nervous

now ; I am a desperate old man, and I will avenge her. Good evening."

The Policeman shook Stephen Walker's hand, and went away. Even had he wished it, he could have urged nothing which would have availed with the old man ; and, indeed, relieved from his fears of bloodshed, he was glad to hear that justice of some kind was to be done.

That evening, after dinner, Captain Bradshaw was still sitting in the dining-room with Alice, when he heard a ring at the bell. After a short conversation in the hall, the servant entered the room.

"If you please, sir, there is a man in the hall wants to speak to you particular."

"What sort of man, James ?"

"Well, sir, a decent-looking man—an old man, sir—not a gentleman—but he looks strange ; rather, I should say, as if he had been drinking, Wild about the eyes, you know, sir."

"And he won't say what he wants, James ?"

"No, sir ; all he will say is that his name is Stephen Walker."

"Stephen Walker ?" Captain Bradshaw repeated to himself once or twice. "Stephen

Walker? I seem to know the name; yes, I remember, now. Stephen Walker, tobacconist. The man Frank picked up—the broken-down gentleman with the pretty daughter. What the deuce can he want?" Then aloud, for this had been muttered to himself, "Show him into the library, James. You may as well wait here till I come back, Alice; I don't suppose I shall be a minute."

"If the man is drunk, Uncle, had you not better tell James to wait at the door?"

"Pooh! my dear," the old officer laughed. "I fancy he's nearly as old as I am. If I want James, I can ring the bell."

Then he rose and went into the library, into which the visitor had already been ushered.

Stephen Walker was standing by the table. He was silent for a minute after the door was shut, looking steadily at Captain Bradshaw, as if to read his character. Captain Bradshaw, in return, looked at him. He saw at once that the footman's surmise was unfounded, but he saw too by the compressed lips and flashing eye that the man was from some cause in a state of extreme agitation and fury; indeed for a moment the thought occurred to him that his

visitor was mad. This idea was at once dismissed when Stephen Walker began to speak.

“Captain Bradshaw, I have come to tell you a story. It is a sad one, sir, but not an uncommon one—not an uncommon one. I, such as you see me, was once a gentleman. My circumstances changed, and I took a very small shop in New Street, where I sold tobacco. I was not, as you see me now, a determined man—perhaps even a dangerous one. I was a broken-down, nervous old man, with only one stay, one hope, one pleasure in the world. I had a daughter, sir; a bright, happy, innocent girl. A man came to us, over and over again, and he won her heart. The old story, Captain Bradshaw, of love and trust. He promised her marriage—over and over again he promised it. But he had an uncle”—Captain Bradshaw started violently; he saw what was coming now. He remembered the conversation he had had with Frank upon this very subject of the tobacconist’s daughter. He remembered the warning he had given, and Frank’s promise not to go there again, and he grew very pale and faint as his visitor went on—“he had an uncle, sir—an uncle from whom he expected to inherit great

wealth—and he dared not risk his anger by an open marriage with my child. He told her that the uncle could not live long, that at his death he would marry her openly, but that if he lived he would at any hazard marry her privately in a short time. Accidentally I gained her secret, and to test the truth of the story I watched for days outside that uncle's door, until I saw the man enter there; then, seeing that the story was true so far, I hoped for the best. You see what a poor, nervous, simple man I was. Even then he had ruined her. I never dreamt of it, or I, old and feeble as I am, would have killed him. A fortnight since, my child saw in the paper the marriage of this man with another. To-day, Captain Bradshaw, I have been down to Gravesend to identify the body of what was once my child. Were I a young man, I would take vengeance with my own hands; but I am old and helpless, and I call on you to give me justice. That man is your nephew, and he is a damned scoundrel!"

Captain Bradshaw sat for a minute or two as if stunned. The old soldier, though passionate and hot tempered, was a man with a great heart, and this sin was one he held in extreme horror. The

story of the man who stood before him would, under any circumstances, have greatly moved him—would have filled him with burning indignation. As it was, the blow fell upon him almost as heavily as upon Stephen Walker. He had lost a son as entirely and finally as the other had lost a daughter. For he loved Frank Maynard as a father might do. True, he had for a few months past treated him with some coolness, but his affection had been unshaken, and he had fully resolved that upon his return from his wedding tour he would take him thoroughly into favour again. To hear now that he was a cruel and cold-blooded seducer, to know that he was utterly worthless, this was to lose him for ever. He hid his face in his hands and groaned. Then with a quick movement, as one determined to throw aside all regrets, he rose to his feet and took Stephen Walker's hand.

"Mr. Walker," he said, "may God help us both! for we suffer nearly equally. I loved that boy as you loved your daughter. He was my heir and the hope of my old age. But what you have told me separates him from me as completely as if he were dead. You ask me for

justice," and here the old man's voice grew sharp and clear, "and justice you shall have. From this hour he is dead to me. Not one farthing of my money shall he ever have. Never again will I speak to him. There, sir, you have my word for it."

"I thank you, sir. As you said, God help us both!" And without another word Stephen Walker turned and left the room.

Alice Heathcote had been rather alarmed by what the servant had said, and had listened with some anxiety for the departure of the strange visitor. Presently she heard his step come along the passage from the study, and then the closing of the front door as he let himself out. She waited two or three minutes, but heard no sound of her uncle coming from his study. Becoming alarmed she went to the door, knocked, and opened it. The old man was still sitting in the chair into which he had sunk while Stephen Walker was telling his story. His hands lay listless beside him, but there was a quick, nervous movement of the fingers. His face was sad and very pale, a grief all the more painful to see that it was tearless. Alice saw at

once that something very serious had happened, the nature of which she could not even guess. Her uncle did not look up at her entrance, and alarmed at this terrible depression, this silence so different from the fits of impatient anger to which Captain Bradshaw was given when put out, she went up to him, took one of his hands in hers, and laid her other upon his shoulder.

"My dear uncle, what is the matter?"

It was only upon the question being repeated, that he looked up.

"Poor Alice!" he said, "you will feel it as much as I do."

More and more alarmed, Alice knelt down by the old man's side.

"What is it, uncle? Please tell me."

"I would keep it from you if I could, Alice; but you must know it. I am grieving, Alice, because I have lost a son. Yes, Alice, it is so," he went on, sadly, in answer to Alice's look of surprise. "I loved him as a son. I looked upon him as my heir, and now he is lost to me for ever."

"Frank!" Alice gasped, with a feeling of sickening dread.

"Yes, my dear,—Frank. He is alive, Alice; alive and well, as far as I know," he said, quickly, for by the ashen pallor of her face he saw that she imagined that he had heard of Frank's death; "but I would far rather have heard of his death. From this moment he is dead to me, —worse than dead. Had he been really dead, I could have mourned him, as a father might mourn the dear child of his old age; better, far better that, than to know that he is a base, dishonourable scoundrel."

As Captain Bradshaw finished, Alice Heathcote leapt to her feet with a start, as rapid as if she had been struck. Her blood rushed to her cheeks, her eyes flashed, and she exclaimed, vehemently,—

"It is false, uncle!—it is false! I would stake my life on Frank's honour! Who dares to say that of him? Frank a base, dishonourable scoundrel! And you believe it? Oh, uncle! uncle! after all these years, to doubt Frank!"

"I would have spoken as confidently and as warmly as you do, Alice, ten minutes ago; but I can do so no longer. There is no doubt now in my mind, none at all. I must tell you the story,

Alice,—you have a right to know it. Sit down, dear, by me, and listen quietly.”

Alice, secure as she felt in Frank’s honour and faith, yet felt a cold chill creep over her, at this tone of quiet conviction upon the part of her uncle. Had he been in a passion she would not have believed what he said, but the tone of deep, quiet sorrow frightened her. She put a stool by his chair, and sat down on it, looking up into his face as he spoke, every vestige of colour fading out of her own as he went on with his story.

“You may remember, Alice, last winter Frank and Mr. Prescott coming in here, and our hearing that Frank had picked a man up from almost underneath the wheels of an omnibus, at the risk of his own life. The man gave Frank one of his cards, which he showed to us. His name was Stephen Walker, tobacconist.”

Alice made a slight sign of assent. She remembered the circumstance well.

“A fortnight or so afterwards, my dear, Frank came in here and told me, laughing, that he had been to see this man; that he had apparently been once a gentleman; and that he had a

very pretty daughter, who was, of course, very grateful to Frank for having saved her father's life."

Alice felt what was coming now, and a feeling of almost terror crept over her.

"As a man of the world, my dear, I spoke to Frank about it. I warned him that he had better not go there again. The girl was very pretty, he said, and very grateful. If he went again, mischief might come of it. My words to him were, if I remember rightly,—'In these cases, nothing but harm can come: a man either makes a fool of himself and marries the girl, or he makes a rascal of himself and does worse.' Frank did not like what I said, at first, but finally agreed in its justice, and promised to go no more. So you see, Alice, he was warned; after that there could be no accident—it was done deliberately. I never heard or thought any more of it until I came into this room this evening. Then when I saw the state of terrible agitation he was in I guessed the truth. He came to call for justice. Frank had won her under promise of marriage. He had said that I was very old, and that he could not

marry her openly until my death; but he promised a secret marriage."

"No, no, uncle," Alice said, vehemently, "I will not believe that; I will not believe it. It is not true. Frank might, though I do not think it, have done what the man accuses him of, but I feel sure he did not. But, uncle, Frank is not mercenary. He never built on your death. No, no, uncle; nothing in the world will make me believe it of him. I am as certain as I am of my own life that he did not."

"My dear Alice," the old man said, sadly, "do you think I should be apt to believe anything against Frank rashly? But there can be no question here. Do you think a man would come from the side of his dead daughter to tell me lies?"

"Oh, uncle! uncle!" Alice cried, pitifully.

"Yes, Alice, it is too true. I must tell you, Alice—you must know it all now, that you may agree with me that we must never speak of him again. So it went on, Alice, until the poor girl read in the papers the announcement of his marriage. Then she left her home suddenly, and her father came to-night to tell me that

he had been to see her body to-day, at Graves-end."

Alice gave a little sob of horror, and hid her face on her uncle's knees.

"Oh, uncle, it is too dreadful—it cannot be true!" she cried at last.

"There can be no doubt, no hope, Alice. The man's story is too clear, and he was too terribly in earnest to doubt him for a moment. It seems that he found out something of it, and watched to see if Frank came here in order to test the truth of that part of the story, and he saw him come in. My dear, there is no doubt. Frank is guilty—guilty of a deliberate act of baseness, done under the worst possible circumstances. From this moment he must be to us as if he were dead. We have been utterly deceived in him. Now we really know him, there is an end of all communication between us."

"But how is it possible, uncle," Alice pleaded, "that Frank, who has always been so true, and straightforward, and honourable, could have done it? It does not seem possible, uncle."

"My dear, all things are possible," the old man said, sadly. "You were reading to me last

week a book where a man, seemingly as open and popular and straightforward as Frank, did the same thing, and you did not see any impossibility in it then. Steerforth was just such another as Frank—he treated little Emily just as Frank has treated this poor girl.”

“ Oh, uncle, I can’t believe it—I can’t believe it !” Alice wailed.

Captain Bradshaw was silent. Presently he said,—

“ Although there can be no doubt as to the circumstances, Alice, still of course we have only heard one side. Frank may have something to urge in his defence—something which may mitigate, although nothing could possibly excuse, the terrible fault he has committed. I shall write to him to-morrow. If he has anything to urge in his defence, he will do so. I trust that he will. I can never know him again; never. But I should be glad, if possible, to think that he has not been such a cold-blooded rascal as he appears to have been. There, Alice, don’t cry any more, dear. Think that it is worse for me than it is for you. You are young, and will make fresh loves, fresh friends. I am old. For me there is

no future hope. I have lost my son. I find that my confidence and love have been misplaced. I cannot begin again. You are all I have in the world now, Alice; for although I like him, I can never love the man who must now be my heir."

CHAPTER XII.

FOLLOWING IT UP.

STEPHEN WALKER turned away from Lowndes Square with a feeling of stern satisfaction. At least, the destroyer of his daughter would not go unpunished. He should pay with the loss of his expected fortune for the damage he had wrought. So far, Stephen Walker thought that his success had been all that he could have wished for; but his task was but begun yet. He had resolved upon blighting his enemy's prospects through life. He had determined that he would devote his whole life to this purpose; that he would everywhere dog his footsteps; that wherever he went, whatever he did, he would follow him, and tell the tale to all who would listen to him. Fred Bingham's friends, his workpeople, everyone with whom he associated, should know that the pleasant, laughing young gentleman was a

heartless scoundrel. "No doubt he had imagined that there was nothing to fear from Carry's father, that the nervous old man would do him no harm, would give him no trouble. Ha, ha!—we shall see." And Stephen Walker laughed fiercely aloud, and shook his clenched fists as he strode along across Sloane Street into Hans Place. With the dignity of a great passion in him, he felt, and was, more of a man than he had ever before been during his life. He stopped at Mr. Bingham's house and rang, sent in his name, and was shown into the study, where Mr. Bingham was engaged upon some plans. He looked up.

"Ah, Mr. Walker; is it you? Haven't I paid your last quarter's account for newspapers?"

"I do not come about bills, Mr. Bingham; I come upon a very different matter."

"Ah, indeed; and what may that be?" Mr. Bingham asked, looking up keenly at his visitor, for he saw at once, by his manner, that he had come upon no ordinary business.

"I will tell you, Mr. Bingham," the man said, shortly.

"Will you take a seat?" Mr. Bingham put in, more and more surprised, but still bland and tranquil in his manner.

"I will not," Stephen Walker said; "no—not if I never sit down again."

Mr. Bingham said nothing; he still preserved his bland smile, but he felt that it was something very serious now.

"You have been to my shop, sir, and you have seen my daughter."

Mr. Bingham made an assenting gesture; but the smile left his face. He guessed somewhat of what was coming.

"She was all I had to love in the world, and I did love her with all my heart and soul. She had grown up all I could wish her—tender, loving, happy, and bright. A villain came to the shop—a smiling, smooth-tongued villain—who told her that he loved her, promised to marry her, and who deceived and ruined her; her, so innocent of the world; her, who trusted him as she trusted her God. He married another, and she read it in the paper and went mad—went mad, and even doubted my forgiveness! I, who would have taken her to my heart

and comforted her, and pitied her. She went mad, sir; and her body was picked up in the Thames yesterday! The scoundrel who did it was your son, Frederick Bingham!"

Mr. Bingham had listened throughout without moving, without changing a muscle. The bland expression had died out from his face; otherwise he manifested no emotion. But all the time Stephen Walker had been speaking his brain had been busily at work. Mr. Bingham was not a very hard-hearted man, but his susceptibilities had been much blunted with long contact with the world; and he was accustomed in his business to what the world calls sharp practice. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have been greatly shocked at the story he had just heard. Perhaps he was now, but the feeling was merged in the more pressing one of actual danger. This man was dangerous. In his present state he was capable of doing any mischief. But what could he do? How would he act? And how could he be met?

These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind during the few seconds Stephen Walker was speaking; nor had he determined what

course to take, when he was unexpectedly relieved by the entrance of Mrs. Bingham, who, not knowing that her husband was engaged, had opened the door and entered in time to hear the closing sentence of Stephen Walker's speech. As a hen will defend her young ones when attacked by a hawk, so did Mrs. Bingham blaze out in defence of her son.

"Oh, you wicked—wicked man! Oh, you bad, abominable person! To come here to say such things against my Freddy, the dearest and best fellow in the world. What does he mean, Richard?" She turned to her husband. "Why don't you give him in charge of the police?"

"Nonsense, my dear," Mr. Bingham said, testily, although he really felt grateful for the opportune interference of his wife. "Do be quiet and reasonable. This is Mr. Walker. A very sad business has taken place: his daughter has made away with herself, and he accuses Fred of having seduced her under promise of marriage."

"Oh, you villain!" Mrs. Bingham said, turning again upon Stephen Walker, as he stood impassive before her. "Oh, you bad, story-

telling man! My Freddy, indeed! who would not hurt a fly, to be accused of doing such wicked things as this. Richard, go out directly and get a policeman. I am ashamed of you, sitting there doing nothing. Why don't you knock him down, or kick him, or do something?"

And then, from indignation and helplessness, Mrs. Bingham sat down and began to cry. By this time Mr. Bingham was sufficiently recovered from his first shock to continue the conversation.

"I suppose, Mr. Walker, before you came here to bring forward such a serious accusation as this, you were quite sure of what you are stating?"

"Quite," Stephen Walker said, gravely.

"I am heartily sorry, Mr. Walker—more sorry than I can say. Unfortunately, there is nothing that I can say or do to alleviate your distress. Is there anything you can possibly suggest that would afford you any satisfaction?"

Stephen Walker waved his hand scornfully.

"I called, Mr. Bingham, to tell you this history—to let you know what this son of yours really is. Will you tell him, from me, that I pray God to curse him for the ruin he has

brought upon my house. Tell him that, although I am an old, feeble man, unable to save my daughter, I will devote the rest of my life to avenge her. That wherever he goes, with whomsoever he associates, I will take care to let them know this story. The men who work for him I will see; the men he does business with I will write to. He thought me harmless and helpless; he thought me incapable alike of protecting Carry, or of avenging her. He will find out his error. This is the second visit I have paid this morning. I have been to Lowndes Square, and have seen Captain Bradshaw, and your son one day will find that he has paid very, very dear for his frolic."

Thus saying, and without waiting for any reply whatever from Mr. Bingham, Stephen Walker left the room. Mr. Bingham sat in a blank stupor of dismay.

"I have been to Captain Bradshaw," he repeated; "and your son will some day find that he has paid very, very dear for his frolic."

There was no mistaking the meaning of that. As far as his uncle was concerned, Fred was ruined. A splendid fortune was lost in one

stroke, and beside this, there was to be a perpetual persecution and scandal. The madman had said that he would follow Fred everywhere, and denounce him to all. This was terrible, and Mr. Bingham leaned back in his chair with a positive groan of dismay. In the meantime Mrs. Bingham continued to cry hysterically.

"What a shameful, vile man," she sobbed at last, "to go about telling stories about poor dear Freddy—the kindest and best fellow in the world. He would not have harmed a worm. If he did do it, I am quite sure it was not his fault. He must have been led on by that shameless, wicked hussy. It was very wrong of him, of course, very wicked and sinful. But not, my dear——"

Mr. Bingham broke in,

"Nonsense, wicked. If it had been fifty times as wicked I should not have minded; but it was madness, sheer madness."

"Richard, I am shocked at you," Mrs. Bingham began in a tone of absolute horror.

"Well, well, my dear, you know I do not mean that; but I am almost beside myself to think of Fred's madness."

"Ay, madness, indeed," Mrs. Bingham said; "it must have been just that, Richard, a sudden madness which made him fall into——"

"There, there, my dear," Mr. Bingham said, "that is quite enough for the present; do go away, and let me think over this affair. It is enough to drive me out of my senses. Do go up to your own room and compose yourself. There is no occasion to tell the girls, and the servants, and everyone else about it."

"As if I were a fool, Richard!" Mrs. Bingham began indignantly; but Mr. Bingham waved his hand so impatiently, that she said no more, but rising with an extremely injured air, left the room.

As for Mr. Bingham, he walked backwards and forwards on the hearthrug, with the air of a man astounded. Once or twice he sat down at his desk, took up his pen, and then throwing it down with a gesture of almost despair, renewed his walk. As has been said, Mr. Bingham was not a really hard-hearted man. He had very frequently interposed in favour of defaulting tenants, and had endeavoured to mitigate the severe measures Fred was disposed to put in force

against them. At any other time he would have been greatly shocked at the news he had heard. Now he quite lost sight of the heartlessness and cruelty of Fred's conduct in the imminence of the danger. His whole thoughts were devoted to the consideration of the best course to be pursued under the circumstances. He could arrive at no conclusion however, except that he had better summon Fred back to town at once. At last, therefore, he sat down in earnest to write, saying, solemnly, as he did so, "Well, after this, I will believe anything. To think that my son, Fred Bingham, could have acted in such an insane way as this—with a girl, too, in his own neighbourhood—and, above all, should have allowed his connection with Captain Bradshaw to be known to her. It is beyond all human comprehension." With this reflection he drew some paper towards him, and wrote, in his beautifully neat handwriting, in which no one could have detected the least sign of haste or agitation, as follows :—

"MY DEAR FRED,

"If anyone had asked me an hour

ago whether I considered you capable of acting like a fool, or a madman, I should have given them one answer ; if I were asked now I should give altogether another one. Mr. Walker has been here, having previously visited Captain Bradshaw, to whom he mentioned that his daughter had drowned herself in the Thames, and that you were not altogether unconnected with the circumstance. To me he announced his intention of devoting the rest of his life to the occupation of keeping your friends, acquaintances, and work-people, *au fait* in the matter. I should say that he is likely to carry out that intention. I make no comment whatever, but should suggest your early return.

“ Your affectionate father,

“ R. BINGHAM.”

Not a pleasant letter for a man to receive with his breakfast within a fortnight of his wedding-day. Fred Bingham was staying at Cromer when the letter reached him. He was laughing and talking to his young wife as he opened his father's letter ; and the first glance at its contents, froze the words on his lips. He never

had any colour to speak of, but his face turned a ghastly pallor. The first thought that shot through him was horror at the news of Carry's death. The second was consternation at its consequences to himself. His wife was startled and alarmed at his face; but he made a gesture to her not to mind him, and even in the short fortnight which had elapsed since her marriage, she had learnt that he must be obeyed. Fred Bingham rose from the table and walked to the window; then he came back again, and said,—

“I have got some troublesome news from town, Margaret; I shall go out for a walk and think it over. You take your breakfast. I shall have mine when I come back.”

For an hour Fred Bingham paced up and down upon the sands. Here were all his plans and hopes destroyed, and all by his own carelessness. How could he have been fool enough to tell Carry Walker about his uncle? Still she had promised not to tell her father, and even had he supposed that her father might have found it out, who could have dreamt that that old imbecile would have ever turned round and become dangerous. Everything had turned out unfor-

tunate. There was Carry. Well, yes, he was very sorry for her, very sorry indeed. But what did she do it for? It really looked as if it was just out of perverseness, when he had intended to have acted kindly to her, and made her comfortable, thus to upset everything, drive her father into a sort of madness, and destroy all his chances in life. It was too provoking. However, one thing was evident, he must take his father's advice, and go up at once to London. He must see Captain Bradshaw—of course it would be a most terrible interview—but it must be got through. Perhaps after a time he might be able to put matters in a better light. Of course any promise of marriage must be denied. There were no proofs whatever of that, except that last letter of his, and any assertion Carry might have made. He should of course plead temptation. Yes, it was a terribly bad business, but something might be got out of the fire. Thus thinking, he at last went back to his hotel, ate a hearty breakfast, and told his wife that he must go up to London on imperative business for twenty-four hours. He said that she must stay where she was, for the house would not be ready

for them for another week, and she would only be in the way. He should be back the next evening without fail. So, after breakfast, he went up to London.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DESPERATE GAME.

FRED BINGHAM, on his arrival in town, drove to the office where he had telegraphed to his father to meet him. The Binghams' office was in Salisbury Street, Strand. There they had two rooms on the ground floor. The one behind was occupied by two articled pupils and a clerk, whose business it was to draw the details of plans and designs, and to make calculations as to quantities and estimates. The front room was a comfortable office. Here was a large drawing table, where Mr. Bingham designed and drew plans. Here was his writing table piled with engineering works. Upon the walls hung architectural and engineering plans of all sorts, façades of churches, plans of hospitals, railway bridges, viaducts, and many other things. Here, too, piled on shelves or leaning against the walls,

were plaster friezes, drain pipes, encaustic tiles, valves, short sections of railway rails, models of bridges and tunnels, and many other engineering odds and ends. Mr. Bingham was standing in his favourite position on the hearthrug, with his back to the empty fireplace, when Fred entered.

"Well, Fred, I must congratulate you on having made as nice a mess of your affairs as could well be imagined."

"There, it's too late to talk about that now," Fred said, shortly. "I've made a fool of myself, and you can't tell me that more strongly than I feel it myself. The question is, what is to be done? My own idea is, that I had better go and see Captain Bradshaw at once—of course knowing nothing about what has taken place. He will do the indignant, and I must be penitent; then, of course, I shall urge youth, inexperience, artful woman, crafty old father, and so on; create as good an impression as I can, profess regret for loss of his good opinion more than that of future fortune; take my leave much depressed, and leave things alone for a few weeks before I approach him again. I suppose that is about the line you recommend?"

"Yes, Fred ; I don't know that you want much advice from me," his father said, dryly. "By the way, you must say the same sort of thing to your mother when you see her. She was in the room, and heard it all, and has been terribly put out, but of course she does not blame you."

Fred looked annoyed.

"I am sorry the old lady heard it. We must talk over the best way to shut that madman's mouth. Well, I shall go and get the business over at once. I will come in to Hans Place after I leave him, and let you know the result."

It was not with very comfortable feelings that Fred Bingham knocked at Captain Bradshaw's door, for he felt that it was by no means improbable that orders might have been given that he was not to be admitted. The footman, however, opened the door and admitted him as usual.

"How are you, James ? My uncle in ?"

"Yes, sir, he's in ; but he's not well—something wrong, sir," he added, with the privileged loquacity of an old domestic.

"Oh, indeed !" Fred said, carelessly. "And Miss Heathcote, is she in ?"

"She is in, but you won't see her, sir; she's poorly too—kept her room all yesterday and to-day. Master is in his study, sir."

Fred Bingham braced himself up for a scene as he followed the footman to the study. The servant opened the door, and announced "Mr. Bingham." Fred entered.

Captain Bradshaw appeared to have been dozing in his easy chair. He looked up, and to Fred's astonishment, instead of saluting him with a torrent of invective, he merely said,—

"Why, Fred, you are soon back again in town. Tired of your honeymoon already?"

Fred was too much surprised to answer at once, and was rapidly revolving in his mind whether this manner was a mere mask assumed by his uncle. However, after a moment's pause, he answered,—

"Not tired at all, uncle; but I had to run up to town for a day on business. I go down to Cromer to-morrow again."

"I think you might have told me you were going to be married, Fred."

"Well, uncle, I hate a fuss about these things,

and we were married as quietly as possible ; so I thought I would say nothing about it until I could tell you that it was all over."

"Well, well, every one to his taste, every one to his taste," Captain Bradshaw said, evidently thinking of something else, and then sat in moody thought.

Fred Bingham looked at him in astonishment. What could this mean ? Did his uncle intend to keep him in ignorance of his knowledge of the affair of Carry, or was it possible that he did not know after all—that Stephen Walker had only intended to frighten him, and had not been to Captain Bradshaw at all ? This hope was dispelled by the old man's next remark.

"The fact is, Fred, I am out of sorts. I have heard a piece of news which has upset me terribly."

"Indeed, uncle ?" was all Fred could say.

"Yes, Fred, a very bad affair ; so bad that I can hardly realise it."

He paused again.

"What is it, uncle ?" Fred asked, with an effort ; for he was far more alarmed at this tone of quiet sadness on the part of his uncle than he

would have been at the most furious burst of passion.

"Yes, Fred; I will tell you the circumstances. An old man called upon me the night before last. He was half beside himself with grief and anger. The man's name was Walker—Stephen Walker. I remembered the name, because I had heard it before under peculiar circumstances. One day last winter, it seems he slipped down in Knightsbridge, and your cousin Frank picked him up just as an omnibus was going to run over him. Perhaps you remember hearing of it?"

Fred could only nod. His uncle had mentioned the fact to him with great glee at the time, but had not mentioned the name, and he was until now ignorant that it was Stephen Walker whom Frank had rescued. He did not, however, speak; he was too anxiously preparing for the blow which he felt sure his uncle was reserving as the climax for this prolix story.

"Some little time afterwards, Frank came in one evening, and told me he had been to see this man, and that he had a pretty daughter—a very pretty daughter. I told Frank he had better not go there again—it was dangerous—

and Frank saw it, and promised not to go again."

The drops of perspiration stood on Fred Bingham's forehead as his uncle went on. This slow approaching to catastrophe was almost more than he could bear, and he had a great mind to throw himself at his uncle's feet and cry for mercy; but before he could determine upon the expediency of such a move, his uncle went on.

"The night before last, as I told you, this man came here to cry for justice and vengeance. He had just come up from Gravesend, where he had been to see the body of his daughter, who had drowned herself in the Thames, and who had been seduced under promise of marriage by that infernal scoundrel, Frank Maynard!"

Fred Bingham had half risen from his seat with the intention of throwing himself at his uncle's knees, when the substitution of Frank's name for his own astonished him into a sharp cry of surprise.

"Frank Maynard!"

"Ah, you may well be astonished, Fred. I would not have believed it—no, I would not have

believed it possible. But there was no doubting the man ; he was too terribly in earnest."

Fred Bingham sat in stupified astonishment. The shock was too great and too sudden for even his constitutional coolness. His first thought, when he did think, was,—was this a mere ruse on the part of his uncle, or was he really deceived ? As he looked at the old man's serious face, and remembered his perfect simple-mindedness and frankness, he saw at once that his uncle was acting no double part—that he really believed it was Frank, and not himself, who had been the offender. Fred remembered, too, that the servant had said Alice was ill and keeping her room, and he was very certain that the news of his own downfall would not so affect her. It was evident that Frank was really looked upon as the offender. Once conscious of this, a whirl of thought flashed through his brain. How could this extraordinary mistake have occurred ?—and, more important still, should he profit by it and keep up the error, or should he confess the fault was his own, and throw himself on his uncle's mercy ? While he was yet debating the question, Captain Bradshaw went on.

"The old man asked for justice and punishment on the destroyer of his child, and he shall have it. Until now, Fred, I tell you fairly, Frank has been my favourite nephew. From the time he was a child, I have looked upon him as my son and heir, and I had left him two-thirds of all my property, the remainder to yourself. I yesterday wrote to my solicitor, requesting him to draw out a new will, leaving everything to yourself."

Fred was decided now. He would risk it. It was evident that if he confessed the fault, he should get nothing; if he could keep up this extraordinary mistake, he should get all; and he really risked nothing, for if he were found out, he should be no worse off then than if he confessed now. It was worth trying for, at any rate. A host of dangers rose up before him, but he put them aside to consider and meet them as they might occur. It was a great stake he was playing for. The whole of Mr. Bradshaw's estates, or nothing; for if he confessed, he should certainly get nothing. He spoke coolly and collectedly.

"I thank you for your kind intentions, uncle, but I can hardly think of this now, I am so sur-

prised, so shocked at this terrible story. I could not have believed that Frank would do such a thing. I knew he was rash and headstrong. I heard, indeed, some stories whispered about him at Cambridge, but I could never—no, not for moment—have believed him capable of such a cold-blooded villany as this seems to have been. Oh, uncle, there must surely be some mistake.”

“No, Fred; there is no mistake. It is too true. There was no mistaking the man’s manner. He was terribly in earnest.”

Fred Bingham said no more for a while, but sat thinking deeply on the course to pursue. At last he said,—

“And what do you mean to do about Frank, uncle? Do you mean to write and tell him what you have discovered?”

“I have been writing this afternoon: I have not sealed the letter. There, you can read what I have said. If he has any excuse to offer for himself—not that he can possibly have any—he will write and urge it.”

Fred Bingham took the letter and read it through very slowly, in order to give himself the more time to think. The letter recapitulated the

incidents connected with Frank's first knowledge of the tobacconist, recalled the warning given to him respecting the pretty daughter, and his promise not to call there again, and then recited Stephen Walker's visit, and the terrible charge brought against him. It concluded by cutting off all connection whatever with him, and forbidding him ever to speak to his uncle again.

Fred saw at once that Frank, upon the receipt of this letter, would insist upon an explanation, would go to the tobacconist and bring him round in triumph to prove his innocence, and that his own guilt would infallibly appear.

"Well, Fred, what do you think of that letter?" his uncle asked at last. "It is conclusive, is it not?"

"Quite so, uncle. Nothing could be better. But——"

"But what, Fred?" Captain Bradshaw asked.

"Well, uncle, I agree with you, of course, that nothing can be more base and heartless than Frank's conduct; but still—still, you see, he has only just married. I am not attempting, much as I wish I could do so, to urge any point in Frank's favour. At the same time, uncle, think

of the misery of his wife, if he gets that letter the first day he returns home, and opens it before her. He might, for instance, laughingly ask her to open his letters, and tell him what they were about; your letter especially, knowing your handwriting, he would suppose could contain nothing she might not read. Imagine the poor girl's feelings. Her happiness would be destroyed for life. Surely, uncle, Frank's punishment would be too severe. Now, if you were to write a letter, using any language you like towards him—abusing him as much as you please, telling him he has forfeited all place in your esteem, and is henceforth to be a stranger—such a letter would not have the same effect upon her. No doubt he would be able to make some excuse which would satisfy her, and at the same time his conscience would tell him the cause of your indignation, and he would be able to write and make any excuses he could for his conduct. If he did not write, you would know it was because he had nothing whatever to urge in palliation.”

“Very right, and very kindly thought of, my boy,” Captain Bradshaw said, warmly. “God

knows, there has been mischief enough done already. I do not wish to wreck another young creature's life. Yes, I will write exactly as you advise. As you say, it will leave it open for him to make any plausible explanation he likes to her, and his own conscience will tell him what it means. As for his making any excuses to me, I am afraid that is altogether out of his power." And the old man sighed deeply.

"It is, indeed, a most distressing affair, uncle, and I am indeed sorry for your sake, and for that of Alice also, for I know she was very fond of Frank. Does she know of the sad business?"

"Yes, Fred; I was obliged to tell her. She must have been informed why all connection with Frank is to cease. She is terribly cut up, but clings to the hope that Frank may have some sort of apology or explanation to make. I confess I don't see that it is possible."

"We must hope that he will, uncle. It is a sad business, and I am truly sorry for your sake. Good-night, now. I shall be up again in a week or so, and will then bring my wife to see you."

"Do, Fred, do; I shall be very glad to see my new niece."

Fred Bingham did not go straight to Hans Place, but walked several times round Lowndes Square, thinking deeply over this new and unexpected state of affairs. There was no doubt he had a difficult and dangerous game to play. He would not have willingly embarked upon it, but it had been in a way forced upon him, and he accepted the risks without flinching. He had every confidence in himself, and the excitement and intrigue exactly suited him. The stakes were worth playing for, and had a double value in his eyes, in that they were to be won at the expense of Frank. At any rate he had the consolation that if he were beaten he would be no worse off than if he had thrown up the cards as hopeless at first. His uncle would have cast him off at once, and he could do no more if he ever found out the truth. There could be no doubt, then, that he had chosen the only possible course. To think that this affair which had seemed destruction to his hopes, should now turn out to have established him as his uncle's sole heir, whereas he was previously to have had only a third. It seemed almost too good to be true. How that blundering old idiot, Walker, could have made

such a mistake, Fred could not at first imagine ; but he came to the correct conclusion that he must have said nephew only, without mentioning names, and that Captain Bradshaw had jumped to the conclusion that the nephew was Frank. Now as to the future. There were two risks—the one from Frank, the other from Stephen Walker. As to Frank, he had already achieved the great point of having the letter worded ambiguously ; and if Frank wrote to demand an explanation, he must somehow intercept the letter, and prevent it reaching Captain Bradshaw. Then he must himself see Frank, and do what he could to keep them asunder. Then, as to this madman, Walker. He would not be likely to go again to Captain Bradshaw. That was most unlikely. Nor would Captain Bradshaw be likely to go to him. As to his threat to dog him, and tell everyone about the affair, that was unpleasant—very unpleasant—and must, if possible, be put a stop to ; but at any rate, it would not be likely to come to Captain Bradshaw's ears. None of Fred's friends were acquainted with his uncle ; and if Walker were to see them all, and tell his story, his uncle would not come to hear of it from

them. What other danger was there?—Alice? Yes, Alice was certainly a danger. He did not exactly see how. But she disliked him, and was very fond of Frank. She was a thoughtful, earnest girl, and would be very likely to take some steps to inquire further. It was even possible that she might go and see Stephen Walker himself.

“Yes,” he thought, “Alice is quite capable of that; and if she does so, it is all up with me.”

Fred stopped in his walk at this new thought. This was, indeed, a danger—a danger against which he saw no prevention. In vain did he think over every possible plan, but nothing satisfactory could be imagined.

“No,” he said at last, as he walked on again; “if she does that I am lost. My only hope is to get him out of the way: and how that is to be done, I don’t see.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A SHOP TO LET.

ONE thing Fred Bingham quite settled in his mind as he walked slowly in the direction of Hans Place, and that was that he would on no account tell his father of the mistake which had occurred. Mr. Bingham might be a sharp practitioner, but Fred felt that even to shield him it was possible that his father might refuse to have anything to do with this scheme of laying the blame upon Frank Maynard's shoulders. Even should he consent to conceal the truth, the hold which the knowledge of such a secret as this would give him, would be most unpleasant. It was quite possible that he and his father might not always get on well together, for the latter, Fred thought, was hardly sharp enough for the times, and might become a drag. No, certainly, Mr. Bingham must not be told.

"Well, Fred, what news?" Mr. Bingham asked, as Fred went into his study.

"Better than I could have expected," Fred said, cheerfully. "The old gentleman, of course, did the savage, but I was extremely penitent, and made an impression on him. Of course he gave me a long lecture upon the heinousness of the offence, but we parted pretty good friends, and I fancy it will all come right in the long run."

"Perhaps he may seem friends, Fred, but when he dies you may find he has left every penny to Frank."

"Perhaps so," Fred said, in a thoughtful voice. "I dare say he would if he were to die to-morrow; but now I have once made my footing good, I think I shall be able to work myself into my old place in time. From some hints he threw out, too, I believe, he is not satisfied with Frank. He's angry, I fancy, because Frank did not marry Alice Heathcote. At any rate, there's a coolness, which makes him the less disposed to be severe with me. No, I think it will all come right in the end."

There was a silence for a minute or two, Mr. Bingham being greatly surprised at Fred's easy

escape, for he remembered how vindictive and unforgiving Captain Bradshaw had been in his wife's case. Presently Fred spoke again.

"Don't you think something could be done to stop that madman's mouth? He has done mischief enough already; but if he is to go about as he threatened, telling this story to every one, it will be a horrible nuisance."

Mr. Bingham thought for a time, and then shook his head.

"He is very much in earnest, Fred. He meant every word he said. There is no offering him money—it would make him worse."

Fred thought for a time.

"One could not begin by offering money; still, he's poor, and money must be an object to him. Look here, father, you must see what you can do. You go round to him in the morning, and try and talk him over. Put to him the misery he has caused me in my own family; you can pitch it in strong, you know, about the old lady. Point out that I am punished besides by losing any hope of my uncle's money. Then talk about my wife; say she's very delicate, and that if this comes to her ears, the consequence will be most serious.

Ask him if he wishes to destroy the happiness of an innocent creature? Beg him to be content with punishing me, as he has already done. Then, if he gives way at all, offer him a thousand pounds—I would willingly pay that—to leave at once, and go right away, and live quietly somewhere else, where the business will not be known.”

“I am afraid, Fred, it will be of no use. He’s been hit too hard.”

“Oh, nonsense, father! You can do it if you take it in hand. Pitch it in strong, you know, about my wife. Tell him that for him to destroy the happiness of an innocent woman, would be as bad as what I have done. Say how devilishly sorry I am. You know the line to take.”

“It’s a very unpleasant business, Fred, but if you think any good can come of it, I will try.”

“Thank you,” Fred said, “and be sure to insist upon his leaving his place at once. I don’t want to have any risk of his meeting my uncle again, and stirring him up afresh.”

The next morning, accordingly, Mr. Bingham started for New Street. Upon arriving at the shop, he was astonished at finding it closed, and

a bill upon the shutter—"This house and shop to be let or sold, enquire of Mr. Thompson, House Agent, Brompton Row." In spite of this notice, he rang at the bell. There was no answer; and a neighbour, seeing Mr. Bingham standing at the door, came out and volunteered the information that Stephen Walker was gone.

"He went off yesterday at twelve o'clock, with his boxes, in a cab."

"Am I likely to be able to find out where he has gone to?" Mr. Bingham asked; "I owe him an account for newspapers."

"I can't say, sir; if anyone knows, it's Mrs. Holl. She's an old friend of his, and has been doing for him lately; she lives in Moor Street, No. 18."

Mr. Bingham went off to Moor Street. He knocked at the door. Mrs. Holl came to it. On seeing a gentleman, she curtseyed.

"Do you want me, sir? I can't ask you to walk in, for I've a boy here down with fever."

"Thank you," Mr. Bingham said; "I called this morning to pay my newsagent, Mr. Walker,

a little account I owe him, and I find his place shut up. I was directed to you as the most likely person to tell me of his whereabouts."

"I know no more, sir, than a new-born child. I only hope he hasn't done anything with himself. I saw him the day afore yesterday, when he came back after burying his daughter; and when I went yesterday morning he was out. When I went again in the afternoon, I found the bill up, and heard he had gone off with his things. I went to the house people, but they could tell me nothing about it. They said that Mr. Walker, who they knew before, from his having bought the house through them, had come to them, all of a sudden, at nine o'clock. He had told them to let the house at once, or to sell it if they got an offer, and pay the amount into a bank for him. He seemed, they said, a good deal flurried, and in a great hurry. They are to send a cart to-day for his furniture, and are to send it to a sale-room. They are to give notice to his tenants, in the upper part of the house, to leave. The news was all so sudden, it has put me quite in a fluster, like; but I don't think he can be going to do any harm to himself, else he

wouldn't have taken his boxes. Do you think so, sir?"

"No, I should think not, Mrs. Holl. He is probably leaving in this sudden and secret way, because he does not like to say good-bye to his friends, and intends to go to some fresh place where no one will know him, or this sad story I have heard of. Good morning, I am much obliged to you for your information."

So saying, Mr. Bingham went back to his son, expecting that the latter would consider this news to be bad. For it was probable that Stephen Walker had left to carry out his plan of vengeance, and was not improbably gone down to the neighbourhood of some of the works upon which they were engaged. To Mr. Bingham's surprise, Fred was excessively pleased.

"So that he's gone, I am contented. Down in the country I don't care a snap what people may say; but as long as he stayed here, there was always a chance of his meeting my uncle again, or of my uncle going to see him. You see, father, I was obliged to put things in the best light possible, and I should not at all like to have Walker referred to again."

"Ah, I see, Fred. I thought you must have made rather a strong case for yourself with the old man, or he would never have come round so easily. When you said you would give a thousand pounds to him to go away at once, I had an idea you must be mightily afraid of his meeting Captain Bradshaw again. Well, Fred, you have saved your thousand pounds, but you'll hear more of him yet before he's done, or I am mistaken."

"It is a respite at any rate," Fred said. "If he comes and bothers me in the country, I'll get him shut up as a lunatic. It won't cost a thousand pounds to do that," and he laughed unpleasantly.

"I shall go back to Cromer by the twelve o'clock train. I shall be up in a week at the latest. I suppose there is nothing particular you want to speak to me about before I go? I have not above a quarter of an hour to spare."

The quarter of an hour was spent in conversation upon business matters, and then Fred Bingham started again for Cromer, in very much higher spirits than he had felt on his journey up the day before.

Fred Bingham had not calculated erroneously when he considered Alice Heathcote to be his most dangerous enemy. At first she had been completely stunned by the blow, and upon leaving her uncle, had gone up to her own room and thrown herself upon her bed, too bewildered, too stricken down even to cry, and lay there quiet and white, with her hand pressed to her forehead. "Frank, wicked! Frank, a scoundrel! It could not be, it could not be." And yet her uncle who knew far more of the world than she did, and who had loved Frank too, seemed to have no doubt, no question upon the subject; nor, as she thought it over and over, did a single ray of hope present itself to her. That she had loved in vain, that he had married another, had been hard to bear, but that was as nothing to this. To know that the man in whom she had put all her faith, and trust, and love, was, after all, a bad, base man, was almost bewildering. If he were false, who could be true? And yet, although she in vain tried to find any solution—any escape—from this dreadful accusation, she did not really believe it. Her instinct seemed to tell her that

Frank could never have acted altogether in this way. He might have been wicked and wrong—she feared there could be no doubt about that—but he never could have been so deliberately base as they said. Yet there was but one explanation which could in any way lessen his offence, an explanation which involved a grievous suspicion of another, and that other now lying dead. Still, Alice did not know her, and she believed even now that she knew something of Frank, and, woman like, was disposed to throw the blame anywhere so that the weight upon him might be lightened. She repeated to herself, woman's usual cry under the circumstances, it must have been her fault; Frank may have been wrong, and foolish, and weak, but he never, never, could be so deliberately wicked as they say he is.

“Poor thing!” Alice thought; “it is very sad to think such a thing now she is dead; but she must have been partly to blame, and to shield herself, she has invented this story of Frank promising to marry her at his uncle's death.”

This story Alice elaborated gradually in the intervals of throbbing pain in her temples, and having once elaborated clung to. Not, as she

told herself, that it could make any difference to her. He was married, and she should never see him again, for she was certain that her uncle would keep his word. Still, now she might think of him sometimes, with sorrow and regret and pain, but without absolute horror. Her idol was terribly cracked and flawed, indeed, but it had not absolutely fallen to pieces. And having at last persuaded herself that it must be so, she fell asleep just as morning was breaking. For the next three days Alice kept her room, completely prostrated with headache, and feeling altogether unequal to going downstairs to talk upon different matters with her uncle. Still she clung to the belief that the version of the story she had imagined to herself, would turn out to be correct, and that Frank could not have been to blame as her uncle believed. The more she thought of his character ever since she had known him, the more positive she felt of his, at any rate, comparative innocence. Oh, if she could but find out the truth! and to do this there was but one way,—namely, to see Stephen Walker himself. She might then find out what foundation he had for his charges, whether he

had absolute proof that Frank had promised to marry his daughter, or whether it was merely the poor girl's own assertion.

It was a strange step, perhaps, for her to take, but Alice rather despised conventionalities, and determined that she would not allow Frank to rest under this dreadful accusation, if she could clear it up. Besides, it would be another fortnight before Frank could arrive, and have an opportunity of clearing himself, and Alice, in her state of restless anxiety, felt that she could not wait for another fortnight. She resolved upon saying nothing to her uncle ; so after he had gone to his club, she went up and put on her things, and telling the footman to follow her, started for New Street. Greatly disappointed was she upon finding the shop shut up ; but being told that Mrs. Holl of 18, Moor Street, was likely to know Stephen Walker's address, she went there, followed in some wonderment by her attendant.

Mrs. Holl was, as usual, at home, but was unable to give Alice any intelligence as to Stephen Walker.

"Can I come in, Mrs. Holl ? I want very much to ask you a question or two."

"Yes, ma'am, and welcome ; but the place is all in a litter, for it's my washing day, and I've been thrown a little back, for my eldest boy's had a sort of fever. He's better to-day, though, and the doctor says there's nothing fectionous in it."

So saying, Mrs. Holl showed Alice into the room, which was filled with a warm, soapy steam.

"Thank you ; I will not sit down," Alice said, as Mrs. Holl began to polish the seat of one of the chairs with her apron. "I have called to ask you about a very sad and distressing affair. I mean about Mr. Walker's daughter. As you know him well, of course you are aware of the circumstances."

"Yes, poor young thing !" Mrs. Holl said ; "I know as much as anyone knows, except her father. Leastways, we know she's dead and buried."

"Mrs. Holl, it is a terrible thing to say, but a very great friend of mine—I may almost say a brother—has been accused by Mr. Walker of having been the cause of this. I need not say how distressed we all are, and how anxious to know something of this unfortunate girl."

"He must be a very bad man, ma'am, saving your presence; but I don't want to speak badly of anyone. It's not my business, and the Almighty knows how to punish."

"What I want to ask you, Mrs. Holl—and I am sure, now you know how greatly I am interested in the matter, you will frankly tell me the truth—was this unfortunate girl a good girl? was she always looked upon before this as a good, innocent girl, because we have only heard of it from her father?"

"Yes, miss. Carry Walker was one of the best of girls; one of the kindest, best-hearted, innocentest, brightest girls you'd ever see. Every one spoke well of her. She was one of the best of girls."

"Thank you, Mrs. Holl," Alice said, sadly; "that is all I wanted to know. Good morning."

And Alice, with a very sad heart, went back to Lowndes Square. She had nothing to do now but to wait for Frank's answer, and she could derive even less hope than before from this.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT CAN IT MEAN ?

It was evening when Frank Maynard arrived home from his honeymoon with his wife. He had taken a house in the then new neighbourhood, Thurloe Square, Brompton ; and Katie, despite the fatigue of the journey from Paris, insisted on immediately going over it all, and in admiring all its arrangements. Very proud was the young husband of the trim little figure, as it tripped through the rooms.

“You are a dear, dear thoughtful old boy,” she said when, her survey completed, she returned again to the dining-room, and took her seat in all the state and dignity of her young matronhood, to make tea for the first time. “Everything is very nice, Frank, and my little special den is charming ; I will give you another kiss for it presently ; but there are too many

rooms, Frank, and I shall feel quite lost." Frank smiled, and Katie, catching his look as she glanced up from her tea making, changed the subject of the conversation hastily. "Sure, Frank, and what a pile of letters there are on the mantel, don't read them all to-night."

"No, Katie, I won't even look at one of them, this first night at home I don't want to think of anyone or anything, but you and my happiness." And so it was not until the next morning after breakfast that Frank set to to examine the pile of letters which had accumulated during his absence. His wife sat down close to him, and listened on amused while he read out an epitome of each communication. Those first opened could be classified under two heads. Letters of congratulation and cards from friends, and the circulars of advertising tradesmen. Presently, however, he came upon a letter with a stiff precise handwriting, and sealed with a coat of arms. "This is from my uncle Bradshaw," he said, "I wonder whether he is in town?" Frank opened the letter, and the careless expression of his face changed, as he read the first line, into

intense astonishment, which deepened into anger as he went on.

His wife, who was watching him, noticed the change in his face, and when she saw he had read it through, asked, "What is the matter, Frank?"

"Wait, dear," Frank said, and again read the letter carefully through. "Either he has gone mad, or I am dreaming," he said at last.

"May I see, Frank?" Katie said, coming across and putting her hand upon his shoulder.

Frank hesitated. "Well, Katie, perhaps better not; it is some extraordinary mistake, and would only worry you." Katie went back to her seat without a word. "Here, darling," Frank said, after a moment's thought, "I wish to have no secrets from you, I only hesitated because I did not wish to worry you; come and sit down on my knee and read this."

Katie sprang over gladly, and took her seat. Frank gave her over the letter, which she, as he had done, read carefully twice through before she spoke. Frank watched her face closely, at first it expressed indignant anger only, then the

colour faded a little, and a pained thoughtful look came into it. The letter was as follows :—

“Frank Maynard, I have loved you from a boy, and would have wagered my life upon your honour. I find that you are a dishonourable scoundrel. You see I don't mince matters with you, I don't give it mild names, I leave the matter to your own conscience. When you learn what has happened, you will, unless you are even more heartless than I even now take you to be, bitterly regret your conduct. Palliation or excuse for you there is none. You were warned, but you shut your ears to the warning. As for me I have done with you. I never will see you again; you have disappointed all my hopes; you have turned out a heartless reprobate; and I have done with you for ever.

“Your indignant uncle,

“RICHARD BRADSHAW.”

Frank spoke first. “It seems to me, Katie, that the old gentleman has gone out of his mind. What he means I have not the remotest idea. I am awfully sorry, Katie, for I like my uncle very

much, he has been the kindest friend to me. As for his money, I have enough for us, dear, and he may do what he likes with it; but I am awfully sorry that he has gone out of his mind. I can only suppose he has been thinking over that Alice Heathcote affair, which I told you about, Katie, till he has fairly gone cranky."

Katie was silent still, then she rose quietly from her husband's knee, and looked him fully in the face with those clear honest eyes of hers. "Frank, dear, you are my husband now, and I know you love me very truly, whatever you may once have done any other. Frank, dear, I am not a child, I know men—do things—before they are married—you know what I mean, Frank? Don't speak, please, or I can't go on. Now, Frank, if you have done any wrong thing—there can be no mistake what your uncle means—if you have deceived, it is no use mincing words, Frank, some one who had loved and trusted you, please tell me. I shall be sorry, Frank, very, very sorry. You will not be quite the same to me; I cannot think of you as I have thought of you before, but I can quite forgive you, because I know you love me now. But, Frank, I must have

it from your own lips. I am your wife now, Frank, and nothing you did before you married me can make me cease to love you, if you only trust in me and tell me. But if I have it from other lips, Frank, if I find you deceive me, I must go away, Frank, even if it break my heart." Katie's voice trembled now, and her eyes filled with tears.

Frank had once or twice tried to interrupt her, had tried to draw her towards him, but there was a sad dignity about the little figure which checked him until she finished.

"Now, Frank, tell me the truth, you may trust me, dear, to hear it, I am your wife."

"My own darling Katie," Frank said, rising and standing before her, "my own loving little wife, how dare you doubt your husband ?"

Katie felt at once by the tone of his voice that her suspicions were groundless, and stopped him by falling crying upon his neck, "Oh, forgive me, Frank, forgive me, for doubting you. I was wicked and wrong, Frank. Oh, my husband, how could I doubt you ? Don't say a word more, Frank, please, please don't; I never should have dreamed it, only I have heard that men look

at these things in a different way to what we do. Say you are not angry, Frank, say you quite forgive me for doubting you."

"You silly little darling," Frank said, putting her back on her old place upon his knee, "there is nothing to forgive. It was natural enough for you to suppose that my crazy uncle must have had some reason for writing such an epistle as that. But it is not so, pet. I give you my word and honour that I have got into no scrape whatever, and that I have not the remotest conception in the world what he means or alludes to, except that absurd Alice Heathcote business. Are you quite satisfied?"

"Yes, yes, Frank, only I am so ashamed of myself for having doubted you."

Katie required a good deal of petting before she could be reconciled to herself, and it was some time before the conversation again came round to the subject of the letter.

"It is really a very serious business, Katie. I never built upon Uncle Bradshaw's money, although if I had been asked, I should certainly have answered that I expected him to leave me, at any rate, half. Well, four or five thousand a year is

no trifle, Katie. We have enough to live upon, darling, but for the sake of our heirs we must regret it."

"If you talk nonsense, Frank, I shan't listen to you."

"I did not know I was talking nonsense, Katie; a man surely may talk of his heirs. Well then, for their sake one naturally does not care suddenly to lose all chance of a fine fortune simply because one's uncle has gone out of his mind."

"And you can't think, Frank, that he has made a mistake about anything else? I mean that it may be something else besides this Miss Heathcote, whom I cannot but think you must have behaved shamefully to, sir; yes, you may shake your head and say no indeed, but I am sure you must have done."

"No, Katie, I cannot think of anything else; and you need not be jealous of Alice Heathcote, I never cared for her, that is not to love her, for a moment. The whole thing was exactly as I told you, a mere crotchet of Captain Bradshaw's."

"Well, Frank, if he is not really out of his

mind, he must be a very wicked old man to write such a letter to you."

"No, Katie, he certainly is not a wicked old man at all. He is a passionate old gentleman if you like, but he is as good-hearted a man as you will meet with in all the course of your life. I tell you what, Katie, this afternoon I will put on my hat and go down to my club, I am sure to meet someone there who will tell me whether it is publicly known that the poor old man has gone out of his mind. I can't go to his house to call after such a letter as that."

"I should think not, Frank," Katie said indignantly.

Frank went up to town in the afternoon, and came back to dinner, looking vexed and annoyed.

"Well, Frank, what news?"

"I can't make head or tail of it, Katie. Captain Bradshaw is, as far as I can hear, as sensible as either you or I. Several of the men I spoke to had met him within the last day or two, and they said he seemed as usual, except, perhaps, that he had not been very lively lately. They were perfectly astounded when I asked whether anyone had noticed anything queer about him, and

evidently thought I must be mad myself to ask such a thing. No, he seems all right enough, and that makes the whole affair more strange than ever. What is to be done, Katie? What do you advise?"

"I should say, Frank, that you can do nothing. If he is not mad, how dare he write to you in that way? It is infamous," Katie said, very indignantly, "and I would not condescend to take any notice of it."

"No, Katie, I can't do that. Captain Bradshaw has always been a very kind friend to me. He is an old man, dear, and I can't put up with such an accusation, and with the loss of his affection, without making at least an effort to clear up the mystery. I will write and say I have received his letter, that I really cannot conceive what he means, and that I must insist upon his explaining himself, as I have a right at least to know what my accusation is. Now, Katie, don't let us worry ourselves about it any more, it is time to dress for dinner. I will write the letter this evening, and post it in the morning. I have half a mind to go down and see him myself; but he is so awfully passionate, and my temper is not of the best, that I believe

if he went on again about that absurd Alice business, which I suppose is somehow at the bottom of it all, I should say things which would make a quarrel we should never make up. No, I think writing will be the best, Katie; don't you?"

"Yes, I think so, Frank; besides you know much better what your uncle is like than I can; I know I should not keep my temper with him."

"I don't think you would, Katie," Frank laughed, "I always said you were a terrible little spitfire, you know."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

THE house in Lowndes Square was hardly a pleasant abode about this time. Captain Bradshaw was irritable beyond measure. The servants led a dreadful life with him, and even Alice Heathcote had to take refuge in her own room, for Alice herself was scarcely able to withstand the excessive fractiousness and ill-temper of her uncle. She was looking very ill, and was really unhappy. Alice had truly ceased to love Frank Maynard. From the day when she had heard from his own lips that he did not love her she had striven hard against her own feelings, but it was not until she knew that he was engaged to another that she was able to quite win a victory over herself. She had been mercilessly severe with herself. She had pictured Frank as sharing his home and his love with another,

and had insisted upon rejoicing over his happiness; she had herself frequently brought the subject round in her conversation with Frank. And so it was, that by joining in her cousin's talk as to his future plans, and by entering into his happy anticipations, Alice gradually conquered herself and came to feel that she could look upon Frank quite as a brother, and rejoice in seeing him happy with another. As she thus gradually conquered her love she became more as she was before the first destruction of her hopes; she grew calm and self-possessed again, her step regained its elasticity, and her eye its steady light.

When Frank had come to say good-bye before going down to his wedding, she almost regretted that she had refused his earnest request to be one of the bridesmaids, for she felt that she could now have seen him married with hardly a pang. But this new trial had once again broken her down. She could not bear to think that Frank, who had been her idol, whom she had looked up to as a model of all that was good and honest and honourable, could have done this thing. She did not think it.

She clung to the belief that he would clear it all up on his return; at any rate, only from Frank's own lips, or from Frank's own handwriting, would she believe it, and she counted the days to his return, when he would get her uncle's letter, and would, she was sure, repel the accusation.

Captain Bradshaw, too, was longing for Frank's return. Not that he doubted the facts. These, to his mind, were clearly established; but he hoped that Frank might be able to offer some sort of palliation or excuse; might somehow put his conduct in a more favourable light; might plead guilty to imprudence, but deny evil intention even when confessing the fault; might, in fact, in some way or other, enable him to forgive him, and after a due amount of scolding and lecturing, to restore him to at least a portion of his old share of his affection.

Fred Bingham, too, grew nervously anxious as the time for Frank's return approached. He came back to town a few days before Frank was expected, but he only called once upon his uncle; he felt that it would look better if he were not to seem too anxious to step into the

place of favourite, and had been very careful during that one visit to say nothing against Frank. He knew that his cousin had not yet received Captain Bradshaw's letter, for he had said on leaving that he should give no address upon the Continent, for that he did not know where he should go, and did not mean to be bothered with letter-writing while he was away. There was, therefore, no danger until Frank's return, and then Fred knew he would at once write to demand an explanation. He felt sure that his uncle's letter contained no direct allusion to the circumstances of which Frank was accused, and that therefore he could produce no proofs of his innocence, which, indeed, now that Stephen Walker had left New Street, was impossible. The great step then was to prevent Captain Bradshaw from receiving Frank's letter demanding an explanation. That once done Fred Bingham felt certain of his ground. He was playing a difficult game for high stakes, but he felt pretty confident in his own skill. His one fear was that Frank, in his indignation, might rush down to Lowndes Square and personally demand an explanation from his

uncle; but the letter had been so extremely offensive, that Fred Bingham hoped and believed that Frank would write. On the day upon which he knew Frank was to return, Fred Bingham called in Lowndes Square, at a time when his uncle would be from home.

“Is Miss Heathcote in?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; she is up in her own room. Shall I tell her you are here?”

“No, James, it is hardly worth while. I could only stay a few minutes. By the way, just step in here, I want to speak to you.” He went into the dining-room and the servant followed and closed the door. “You must have had rather a hard time with your master lately, James.”

“Awful, sir; I can’t stand it much longer. Flesh and blood can’t put up beyond a certain point, you know, sir. Do what I will, nothing pleases him. He does swear sometimes really awful to hear; but there, sir, I need not tell you; you know what master is.”

“Well, James, he has been a good deal put out lately. There is a man who fancies he has some claim upon my uncle, and he writes to him and threatens to make public some old

story which your master does not want talked about. Now, I am on this man's track, and I fancy I shall be able to find him in a day or two and put an end to all this. I expect he will be writing to-day or to-morrow to my uncle again, and I know it will make him so furious that he will be doing something rash. Now, I wish to prevent that letter reaching him until I have seen this man who is annoying him. I want you, therefore, to show me all the letters that come for the next day or two. I will come over twice a-day, so you will only have to keep them back one post. I only want to save him annoyance, and I can see he is quite wearing Miss Heathcote out. I will give you a five pound note if you will manage this, and you will be doing your master a real service. I know I can rely upon your holding your tongue. What do you say, James ? ”

“Lor’ yes, sir, I would do anything to save master from annoyance. He is a real good master on the whole, though he is awful, sir. I can assure you he is downright awful when he is put out.”

“I am sure he must be very difficult to

manage, James. The best way to arrange this will be for me to call each day at nine o'clock in the morning and at three in the afternoon. He never comes down to breakfast until ten, and Miss Heathcote does not come down till half-past nine, so there is no chance of his knowing that I have come; you can be looking out of the hall window and can open the door when you see me. I will call again at three, after he has gone out, and I will get you to put on your hat and run round to Hans Place of an evening with any letter which may come by a late post. You understand, James?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Bingham! I will see to it. It is only for two or three days you say."

The next day there was no letter from Frank Maynard, nor was there on the following morning; but when Fred Bingham called at three o'clock there was a letter, the handwriting of which he at once recognised.

"Ah! this is the letter, James. I am very glad I have stopped it, especially as I expect to see the man this evening and to put a stop to his annoying my uncle. Here is what I promised you, James. I need not tell you to

say nothing about it, for my uncle would not be pleased if he knew I was interfering in his affairs even for his own good."

"You may be sure I won't say a word, sir. I do think master has been expecting the letter, for he has been very anxious about letters the last day or two, and savage, sir, that savage that one daren't as much as look at him. If he goes on like this I must make a change, sir. I can't stand it much longer."

"I dare say he will be better, James, when this annoyance is removed. I will go into the dining-room for a few minutes, I have a letter to write which I forgot before I started."

Once in the dining-room Fred Bingham took the inkstand and writing materials from the side-table, and then produced from a large pocket-book an envelope upon which he had written Frank Maynard's name and address in a very accurate imitation of the peculiar hand of Captain Bradshaw. In this he enclosed Frank's letter, and, lighting the taper, sealed it with a small seal which was in the drawer of the inkstand, and which bore the three-fingered hand, the crest of the Bradshaws.

"There," he said, with his unpleasant smile, "if that won't keep you apart, Master Frank, I am mistaken ; you are a very fine fellow, no doubt, and Alice Heathcote liked you better than she did me ; but I don't think you will have much reason to boast in the end. Now, if the old man does but go away for the winter, as he talks about, there is no fear, of their coming together again, and he is too proud and too passionate, and Frank is too hot-headed and mighty ever to condescend to make the first advances. I don't think the old boy can live long."

So, putting on his hat he went out, down into Knightsbridge and up the hill, dropping the letter into the post-office at the corner of Wilton Place. Then he sauntered on, smiling pleasantly as he went, and meditating not unflattering thoughts of himself.

"Yes, Fred Bingham," he concluded, "deuced few fellows would have got, as you have, out of about as nasty a scrape as a man could want to get into. Made it turn out all to my advantage ; why, I might have tried, and schemed, and flattered the old man, and listened to his endless stories about India, and at most I should only

have shared with Frank. Now I am as good as certain of it all. I am a lucky fellow,"—and here he gave a penny to a beggar-woman, who looked after him and blessed him for a pleasant-looking young gentleman—"very lucky; to think of old Walker never mentioning my name! That was a fluke indeed! Savage old brute, who would have thought it of him? Poor Carry." And here the smile passed away from his face, and he went on angrily, "A little idiot, I would have made her comfortable, and settled her in some snug little place, and she upsets the whole thing. She must have known I never meant to marry her, and why the deuce she could not have done as other girls do, and made the best of it, I can't make out. Instead of that she nearly ruins me. Bah! what fools women are," and he gave a savage cut with his cane at a dog who was asleep by the railings by the side of the footway. The dog leapt up with a sharp yell, and Fred Bingham went on relieved, and rather liking than otherwise the curses and threats which the dog's master, a little boy with matches, shouted after him.

The letter was delivered to Frank as he was sitting with his wife after dinner.

"Here is the answer, Katie, sealed with the family crest in due form," and he tore the paper so as not to destroy the seal, with the intention of showing the crest to her. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, angrily, "this is too bad, Katie; he has sent back my letter unopened, without a word."

Katie's face flushed up, and she was about to burst out indignantly, but seeing by her husband's face that he was grieved as well as angry, she only said,—

"Never mind, Frank, it is no use our worrying ourselves about it; you can do nothing more after this refusal to hear you. We have a good conscience, dear, and can afford to wait. As you said at first, Frank, there can be no doubt that your uncle has worried himself so much about the upset of his plans for you to marry that Miss Heathcote, that he has really gone a little out of his mind about it. Perhaps it is a pity you did not do as he wanted you to," and she looked up maliciously at Frank.

The attack had the effect she desired, and in administering what he called punish-

ment Frank soon forgot the annoyance of the letter.

It was not, indeed, until they rose to go upstairs to tea, that the subject was renewed ; then Frank put the letter into its envelope, opened his desk, and threw it in.

"There," he said, "we won't talk about it any more, Katie. It is a great annoyance, but it can't be helped. It is no use crying over spilt milk."

The next day Katie sat up in state, and many of Frank's acquaintances or friends called, and also friends of the Drakes. Frank, of course, stayed at home to help his wife through the ordeal. Among the callers was Fred Bingham. After the first introduction and greetings were over, Frank said to him aside,—

"Look here, Fred, I want to have a talk with you about a most unpleasant business, which I can't for the life of me understand. I can't talk now before all these people. Come, like a good fellow, to dinner this evening. We shall be alone, and then I can tell you all about it."

"Very well, Frank, I will come."

Fred then turned to Katie, and was very chatty and amusing, as he could be when he chose. He stayed some little time, and helped Frank much in smoothing away the stiffness, and in filling up the occasional pauses which are incidental to ceremonies of this kind.

He came again to dinner, and was still in high spirits, paying Katie many hyperbolical compliments, which she laughed at, telling him that he was not an Irishman, and that no one but Irishmen had a right to talk outrageous nonsense.

Soon after the dessert was placed upon the table, Frank said to his wife,—

“There, Katie, I want to talk to Fred, so go upstairs like a good girl, and make tea for us.” Then, when he was with his cousin, he went on, “Now, Fred, I want to talk to you. I have had a most extraordinary letter from my uncle, accusing me of unheard-of wickedness, and break-off all acquaintance and connection with me. There it is, read it through, and tell me what it means.”

Fred Bingham read Captain Bradshaw's letter through.

"Extraordinary," he said; "but I am really hardly surprised. He has spoken to me in a rambling, excited way about you, and I really am afraid that he is going a little out of his mind."

Frank looked at the table gloomily.

"I have written to him to demand an explanation, and he has returned the letter unopened." His cousin looked grieved rather than surprised. "It is abominable," Frank went on, warmly; "the only possible reason I can see is that I refused to marry Alice Heathcote, when he had set his mind upon it."

Fred Bingham had long suspected that such had been Captain Bradshaw's wish, and he now took advantage of the knowledge.

"Yes," he said, "absurd as it is, Frank, from a few words he let drop when he was in one of his passions the other day, I supposed it was that. He said something about all his plans thwarted—infamous scoundrel—break Alice's heart—have nothing to do with him."

"Yes," Frank said, "I can quite fancy him. But he must be mad, Fred. It was all his own hatching up. Alice and I never cared a scrap

for each other. Sisterly, and so on, but nothing else."

Fred Bingham was silent.

"Don't you believe me, Fred?" Frank asked, warmly.

"Well, Frank, I don't question what you say about your own feelings, and I am sure that you are the last fellow to intend to trifle with any girl's affections; but, if you frankly wish my opinion, I tell you honestly I have no question that Alice Heathcote did love you."

"Nonsense, man!" Frank said, very angrily, "Alice never cared a scrap for me; she told me so herself."

"Did you ask her then, Frank?" Fred said, pointedly.

"No, I did not," Frank said, still more indignant; "have I not told you I never thought of such a thing. Uncle and I were having a row. He was insisting on my marrying her, I was saying I would not, because I did not love her—well, she was in the next room and heard it all, and came in and told her uncle that it was out of the question, for that I did not love her and she did not love me."

Fred looked up almost contemptuously. How stupid this big strong man was to be sure.

"And what do you suppose she could have said, Frank? She had just heard you say you did not love her, and would not marry her; and do you think that a girl like Alice Heathcote could have done anything else under the circumstances? Do you think she could have burst out crying and told you she loved you and prayed you to marry her?"

Frank sat down in his chair in sheer dismay.

"How long was this ago, Frank? Six months?"

Frank nodded.

"Just as I thought—just the time Alice got ill and low-spirited. I saw it all along. I was certain that she loved you, and I thought you loved her. I always looked upon it as a settled thing; and, indeed, it is hardly likely your uncle would have gone so far as he did, if he had not been sure Alice's happiness was concerned."

Frank sat petrified; at last he said,—

"And upon your soul and honour, Fred, do you believe she loved me?"

"Upon my soul and honour I do, Frank."

And for once Fred Bingham spoke the truth.

Frank absolutely groaned.

"Poor Alice! poor Alice! and I never dreamt of it, never once. This is worse than the other. To think of my having made her unhappy. No wonder my uncle is so angry, and that it has worked on his brain. What is to be done? I can't write to her and explain matters."

"I should think not," Fred Bingham said dryly. "In the first place your letter would be returned, for I know that uncle has made her promise not to communicate with you in any way, and not even to speak if she meets you accidentally. And in the next place Alice Heathcote is hardly the sort of girl to accept condolences from a man who has slighted her affection."

Frank looked furiously at the speaker, but he felt that the remark was true.

"Well," he said, at last, "this is a nice thing to meet a man on his return from his honeymoon—the girl he cared for most in the world, next to his wife, made unhappy—my uncle

altogether estranged, and in fact carrying the matter to a point of lunacy; and nothing possible to be done."

"I dare say matters will right themselves in time, Frank. Our uncle talks about travelling, and the change will, no doubt, do him good, and set Alice up; and, seeing that, he will get over his great hallucination."

"And if he does not," Frank said, rather bitterly, "I suppose I may wish you joy of being sole inheritor of Wyvern Park?"

"Frank, that is not like you," Fred said, reproachfully. "I should have thought you would have known me better than to suppose me capable of taking advantage of it, even if Captain Bradshaw did, in his present state, pass you over in his will. No, Frank."

"I beg your pardon, Fred," Frank broke in; "upon my word, I beg your pardon. I did not mean what I said for a moment. I know you are the best-hearted fellow in the world, and have always said so. No, no, old man, I have no jealousy of you, I give you my word." And he shook Fred Bingham's hand warmly. "And now, Fred, I won't ask you to go upstairs to-

night. I am really upset, and I must tell Katie about this miserable business, and I suppose she can hardly be expected to see it quite in the right light. Good-night, old fellow! Come again soon.'

CHAPTER XVII.

WAITING FOR THE ANSWER.

"HAS he gone, Frank?" Katie asked, as her husband entered the drawing-room alone.

"Yes, pet, I wanted to have you all to myself."

Katie was standing with her elbow on the mantel, her smooth forehead was knitted up into a frown, and she looked a very thoughtful little personage indeed.

"So that is the Fred Bingham I have often heard you speak of, Frank?"

Frank nodded.

"And you really like him, Frank, really think him honest and true?"

"I don't like him so very much, Katie, but I think he is a thoroughly good-hearted fellow."

"Frank, I would not trust him as far as I could see him."

"No, Katie !" Frank said, half amused, half vexed at finding his wife thus early set against the friend for whom he had already fought so many hard battles. "Don't you like him, then?"

"He is amusing," Katie said, indifferently, "but oh, Frank! he is so false. My flesh crept all over when he shook hands with me this morning."

"Now, that's not like you, Katie; I am sure he made himself very agreeable. I don't like you to take prejudices against men I have so long known."

"I am sorry, Frank," she said, simply, "but I can't help myself. A man I don't like at first sight I never like. A man I do like, I like very much; and I always find I am right. It is an instinct, or a prejudice, if you like, Frank, but in some things instinct is stronger than reason."

Frank was vexed, but he only said, "Well, Katie, one can't argue against a prejudice. Only, remember I like Fred Bingham, and have always found him a very good fellow, and I have known him for many years. Besides,

Katie, you know your prejudices are sometimes erroneous."

His wife made a gesture of dissent.

"Come, Katie, you know you almost hated me at first, and yet I think you like me a little now."

Katie coloured. "You silly boy, you know that was a different thing; you know why I hated you."

"No, really, Katie; why?"

But this was a secret Katie could only tell when she had nestled close up to her husband, and his arm was round her waist. Then she looked up in his face, and said, "I hated you, Frank, because you were making me love you before I thought you loved me."

"And now, Katie," Frank said presently, "I must tell you what I have learned from Fred Bingham, and it has affected me very much, dear."

Katie was all attention now, and took her stand by her husband's chair, so that she could pet him if such a step were necessary.

"It is rather a difficult thing for a man to say, Katie, and it is only because I was really

ignorant and wholly innocent in the affair that I can tell you at all. I am very much afraid that, without the slightest intention on my part, I have made a very dear, good girl unhappy."

Katie drew a little farther off now.

"Alice Heathcote?"

"Yes, dear, Alice Heathcote; Fred says, and he was certainly quite in earnest about it, that my uncle's anger is caused by his disappointment at my not marrying Alice. He says my uncle has harped upon the subject until he thinks with me that his brain has gone a little wrong. But the worst of it is, he is convinced that Alice—well, it seems absurd, Katie—did love me, and that my uncle's indignation and anger are upon her account.

"You are sure, quite sure, Frank, that you never made love to her?"

"Quite sure, you jealous little thing. I always liked her, Kate, just as I might like a sister. I never had the slightest idea of making love to her. I would tell you if I had, dear, for I do not want to have any secrets from you. She,

no doubt, misinterpreted my manner, and her uncle having made up his mind I was to marry her, led her into the mistake. She has been poorly for some time, Katie, and I am really afraid it is from that. It is very absurd, of course."

"I am really very sorry, Frank," Katie said, feeling that Frank was speaking the whole truth, and that she could afford to be magnanimous, "but what is to be done? I am afraid it is too late for me to give you up now."

"You are a goose, Katie. But be serious, and give me your opinion, What is to be done?"

"The only thing which I can suggest, Frank, is for me to go to her and say that I am sorry the mistake has occurred, and that I will go back to Staffordshire again, and let you do as you like."

Katie had never seen Miss Heathcote; nevertheless, from what Frank had told her of their early life together, she had somehow intuitively felt her to be a rival, and now, like a true woman, could not help a little enjoyment of her triumph.

"Very well, Katie, if that is the way you look upon it, we will not discuss the matter any farther."

Frank was really hurt, and he spoke coldly, as he had never spoken to his wife before.

"No, no, Frank!" she said, throwing her arm round his neck as he was rising from his chair. "I am wrong, dear, I am very wrong; but you know I am a wild little thing; don't be angry with me, darling. It was natural, you know, that I should be a little jealous of other people loving my Frank as I love him. But I quite believe what you say, and am really very sorry for Miss Heathcote. I can fancy how unhappy she must be. She is very nice, isn't she?"

"She is very nice, Katie, and most men would have loved her very much. She is not my style, you know; I like something I can pet and love; she was too tall and stately, not a bit like you, Katie; as nice in her way as you are in yours, but then her way was not my way, and I suppose yours is."

Katie was quite mollified now.

"Poor Alice!" she said, "I wish I had known her."

"I can't quite make it all out," Frank said thoughtfully. "Alice certainly was quiet, and looked ill for some time after that row I had with Captain Bradshaw. But she was looking better and brighter again lately, and since I have been engaged to you she has been more natural and affectionate again with me. Whatever she may have felt, I am certain that she will be as sorry for this insane conduct of my uncle's as I am. I wish I could see her and have a chat with her; but Fred tells me that my uncle has made her give him a solemn promise not to meet me, or even to speak to me if she accidentally comes across me. So you see, Katie, there is nothing to be done but to take matters quietly, and to trust in their coming right in the end."

His wife was silent for some time. Presently she said, "You won't be vexed at my asking you a question, Frank?"

"No, Katie."

"You promise?"

Frank nodded.

"You and Mr. Bingham are the two nearest relations to Captain Bradshaw, are you not?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then, in the event of your uncle permanently quarrelling with you, I suppose Fred Bingham will be his heir?"

"Most likely, Katie."

"Now, Frank, don't be vexed, but I won't talk of it again. I own I do not see how he could have done you any harm in this matter, but I feel sure he would if he could. Please, please, Frank, don't trust him. He is not good, I am sure of it."

"There, Katie, I won't be vexed because I promised. But you are wrong, dear. However, right or wrong, Fred can do me no harm. If my uncle comes to his senses again, I am sure he will be heartily sorry for what he has done, and I know Alice will bring things round if she can. At the same time I do not deceive myself. Harry Bradshaw is not a man very easily to get an idea out of his head. He is a most kind-hearted man, but as obstinate as a mule. He has never spoken to his sister since she married Mr.

Bingham. Did I ever tell you about his only daughter, Katie ? ”

“ No, Frank, I did not even know he had any children.”

Hereupon Frank told what he knew about Captain Bradshaw's daughter having made some low marriage, of his having sent her off, and of her having, as Frank had heard from his parents, died somewhere in great poverty. And Katie, after hearing it, made up her own mind that Captain Bradshaw must be a very cruel man ; and that, except as to the money, the loss of his acquaintance was no great matter. As for Alice Heathcote, of course she was very sorry for her ; but perhaps on the whole it was just as well—of course, for her sake—that she and Frank were not to meet again. These opinions, however, Katie wisely kept to herself.

These three days had passed very slowly to the inhabitants of Lowndes Square. The first day Captain Bradshaw had sworn more violently than ever ; the second day he was more quiet ; and the third day he was very sad. Alice, too, had suffered terribly, her eyes were swollen with

crying, and the colour faded altogether out from her cheeks. On that day, after dinner, he said suddenly, after a long silence,—

“It is no use waiting any longer, Alice. Let us go away for a bit.”

Alice’s eyes filled with tears. Neither she nor her guardian had ever spoken of Frank’s fault since that first day, but each perfectly understood the other’s thoughts; both knew how they had longed for Frank’s return, and how they had hoped that he would offer some protest against his sentence, would urge some point in mitigation of his offence; that, at least, he would have cried, “I have sinned, and I am deeply punished; have pity upon me.” Alice then knew what her uncle meant. It was no use waiting any more. Frank had nothing to say, nothing to urge; he would not even write to express sorrow. He was separated from her for ever, more than time or place, more even than death could have divided them. Her tears fell fast, but she tried to speak steadily.

“Yes, uncle, please let us go abroad.”

“Yes, Alice,” and his voice too shook as he

spoke ; "suppose we go to Rome for the winter. I have often thought of taking you ; and then next spring, you know, we can go to Jerusalem, and the Nile, and all sorts of places. We can be away as long as we like, my dear, no one will miss us here."

Alice was kneeling by his side now, crying unrestrainedly.

"Poor child !" he said, stroking her hair. "I have been a downright brute lately, but I could not help it ; we shall get on better again after a while. To think how all my plans and schemes have gone wrong. How I loved that boy, and trusted him and believed in him. How I have gladdened my heart to think that after I was gone you would be standing together in the old hall of Wyvern. And how he has turned out——"

"No, no, uncle !" Alice burst out, "don't say anything against him—I can't bear it, I can't bear it ! I know it is so ; but even now, though I know it, though he says not a word, I don't believe it in my heart. The Frank I loved—for I did love him, uncle—

could not have done it, I know he could not. You tell me he has. He does not answer. He tells me so himself. Still I say he could not. Please don't speak against him, uncle—please never mention him again. Let us think he is dead; we can forgive the dead, you know. Let us think he died a month ago when he said good-bye."

"Ah, that mistake of mine," the old man began, when Alice interrupted him,—

"No, uncle, you must not think that—that pain is over long ago. I did love him once, dearly, and I suffered, yes, I own I suffered, when I found out I had deceived myself, but I had got over that. He could never be anything to me, and I had taught myself to look upon him as a dear friend, a brother. No, uncle, it is not the man I had loved, but the brother I esteemed and trusted and believed in, whom I am grieving for now."

"It shall be as you like, dear," her uncle said, kissing her. "And now, when will you be ready to start?"

"The sooner the better, uncle. I have nothing

to do but to pack up. By the day after tomorrow I shall be quite ready."

And so, in two more days, the house at Lowndes Square was shut up, and the old captain was missed from his well known seat at his club.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CUT DIRECT.

IT is now eighteen months since Frank Maynard's marriage, and has been a very quiet happy time to him. Not many incidents have occurred; the most important by far having been the birth of a son about a month back. Katie is of course very proud of it, and is a little disappointed that her husband does not consider it the finest boy in the world. Frank, however, pleads that he has no doubt that if she says so she is correct, but that for his part he can really see no difference between one baby and another—they are all queer little animals, till they begin to look about and know people. Frank has entered at the bar, and is reading to a greater extent than either he or Prescott, who had advised the step, had expected. But, indeed, Frank had found that he was only in Katie's way staying at

home all day, and that the long days with nothing to do really hung heavy upon his hands. Complaining of this to Prescott, the latter had renewed his former suggestion, that his friend should enter at the bar, and Frank had willingly accepted the idea, and had established himself in a room adjoining his friend's. Unfortunately it had happened that Prescott had been away on circuit at the time of the Maynards' return from their wedding-tour, and Frank had not therefore had the benefit of his advice as to the best course of action to be pursued in reference to Captain Bradshaw's extraordinary conduct. Upon Prescott's hearing of this, he had been as much puzzled as Frank himself. He, like Katie, had at first suspected that Fred Bingham must have had some hand in it; but Frank pointed out that he had seen his uncle only the day before he had gone down into Staffordshire to be married, and that he was then friendly enough. Fred Bingham was then out of town, and had not returned from his wedding-tour until after Captain Bradshaw's letter would have been written, he could therefore in no way have influenced his uncle's proceedings. This

was so evident, that Prescott had abandoned his idea, and had been obliged to fall back upon Frank's notion that the old man's head must have turned a little at the failure of his favourite plan. He said, that had he been in town, he should have advised Frank, upon the receipt of his uncle's unaccountable letter, to have called upon him in person. He could not, however, but acknowledge that the fact of Captain Bradshaw's returning the letter unopened, was evident proof that he would not have seen his nephew, and that even had he done so, a quarrel might have taken place, which would have rendered any future reconciliation impossible. To Prescott, as well as to Frank, this breach in the friendly relations was a trial. Prescott had never even hoped to win Alice Heathcote as long as Frank had remained unmarried, but he had a faint hope that after Frank's marriage he might some day succeed in gaining her love. Now this hope was lost; for, unless this inexplicable quarrel was made up, Prescott felt that he as Frank's friend could no longer visit at Lowndes Square. Both had hoped that Captain Bradshaw would return in an altered state of mind from his long

tour. He had now, however, been back in England nearly a month, and Frank had received no communication from him. This hope then was lost, for it was evident that the old man was as determined as ever that the estrangement should be final. During these eighteen months the cousins had seen but little of each other. Their respective wives had called upon each other, and each had dined at the other's home; but Fred was a good deal away from town, and Mrs. Frank, having in no way altered her first conceived opinion of him, the intercourse between Thurloe Square and Harley Street was not of a very cordial nature.

Captain Bradshaw had returned very little altered by his long ramble abroad. He was as hearty and as cheery as of old, before his dearest wishes about his ward's marriage had been thwarted. His journey had altogether done him good. It had been a complete change of life to him, and he had greatly enjoyed it. Of course he had grumbled, and had sworn terribly at Italians, Egyptians, Arabs, and many other people; but he had enjoyed it, and had confessed as much to Alice. At the same time he was very glad to be back again in Lowndes Square,

and to go off as of old to his club. For Alice's sake, too, he had determined to go out more into society. They had made a great many friends and acquaintances abroad, and the Captain inaugurated his return by a series of dinner-parties. Alice, too, had benefited greatly by the change of scene. She was essentially a girl of a healthy organization, and had resolutely exerted herself to shake off the depression which had weighed upon her when she started. The constant change of scene and the desire to amuse her uncle had aided her efforts, and in a few months from the time of her leaving England, the tone of her mind was completely restored. Very much was Alice Heathcote admired in the English circle at Rome. She was very quiet, very unaffected, and somewhat stately. Several of her countrymen had tried their best to win the prize of the season, but Alice gave no encouragement to any of them, and went away quite heartwhole in the Spring with her uncle. Another year's wandering had quite completed her cure, and she could now think sadly, but without deep pain, of the forfeiture by Frank Maynard of her esteem as well as of her love.

For now that she could think calmly over it, she could not but allow that there was no doubt of his unworthiness.

Once only in the month which had passed since their return to London had she seen him ; for Frank had from the first gradually dropped the acquaintance of those few friends at whose houses he would be likely to meet his uncle on his return.

Alice was walking down Knightsbridge with her uncle, when they came upon a tall gentleman with a lady on his arm. Alice and her uncle recognised them at the same moment, and each could feel the other start slightly. Alice grew very pale, but looked straight forward, as did her uncle. Frank coloured with indignation, but he, too, gave no sign of recognition. Katie felt her husband draw himself up stiffly, and looked up in his face. Then she glanced at the passers. Their faces, as well as her husband's, told her who they were.

"Is that your uncle, Frank ?"

"Yes, Katie," Frank said. "Those are my uncle and Alice Heathcote. Is it not too bad, Katie ? He must be as much out of his mind as

ever. And I suppose Alice dared not notice me."

"I don't quite think that she wished to speak any more than he did, Frank. She looked very cold and proud. Never mind, dear. We can do very well without them."

"Very well, Katie, I don't absolutely care a bit, only the utter injustice and absurdity of the thing make me angry. No, dear, I am perfectly happy as I am."

Katie was rather pleased, too, and comparing the stately Miss Heathcote to herself, she said, "After all, I do think I can make Frank happier than she would ever have done." A thought when they were alone she confided to her husband, who said he had never doubted the fact for a moment.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHANGE OF PLAN.

JOHN HOLL's habitation had not changed very greatly since the night that Frank Maynard had gone there with his friend Prescott to help Bessy Holl in her time of trouble. Bessy had long since started to join her husband—sooner, indeed, than she had ever hoped to do—for eight months after he had sailed, a letter arrived from him, with good news for his anxious wife. He told her that at first his life on board ship had been very miserable. His companions were principally ruffians of the lowest class, but it happened that the officer in command wanted a clerk, and had employed him for some hours each day in writing. This officer had taken a liking to him, and had granted him the great indulgence of sleeping apart from the general herd of convicts, who had before made his life

miserable by their perpetual blasphemies and disputes. When the voyage was half over they had attempted a rising, with the object of murdering the warders and seizing the ship. In the short fray which followed he had been able to be of some assistance, and had received a severe blow, intended for the commanding officer, from a belaying pin, which had laid him up for some time. Upon landing, the officer had reported so strongly in favour of his conduct, that the governor of the establishment had written to the home authorities in mitigation of his sentence, and had promised him a ticket of leave at the end of six months, employing him in the meantime in the office. He therefore told Bessy she could at once sail for Adelaide; he would be able to join her upon her arrival.

Frank had been down staying at the Drakes' with his wife, and therefore did not see the grateful woman before she started. With this exception, things went on as before. The only change was in the cripple. He had altered greatly. He still worked at his wax-flower making, and studied at his books, but it was no

longer with the keen interest with which he had formerly worked. He was no longer cheerful and even gay, but would sit at his work for hours without speaking. He was much thinner than he had been, and his face had the expression of great suffering, which is often to be seen in deformed people. He could no longer swing himself upstairs to his bedroom, but slept in the little room on the ground-floor, which John Holl and his wife had resigned to him. Sarah Holl grieved sadly over the change; she loved the lad more than her own children; for had she not done more for him? Palpably, James was fading. He was not dying of a broken heart, but he was giving up life because he no longer cared about living. He had loved Carry, as an ordinary man could not have loved her. Other men would have their pursuits and their pleasures, and their duties; he had only her. He knew that she was not for him. He never dreamt of her in that way. It was a devotion such as a Parsee might pay to his great god of heat and light. She was as far out of his reach, and yet she lighted and gladdened his life. With her loss all its light had gone out. It never

entered his thought to blame her. The fire worshipper would as soon blame the sun-god when a cloud has passed between him and the earth. He cursed her destroyer; cursed him with all the intense bitterness of impotence, for none knew who was this man who had brought ruin to the quiet home in New Street. And so all his life changed to bitterness. Why was he ever born? he asked himself, over and over again; why was he sent into the earth to be a mere weight upon other people? Oh, that he was strong, if only for a little time; if only for long enough to find out and to kill this man who had murdered Carry. He could die then; die quietly and happily; ay, even upon a gallows, with the world jeering at him and cursing him. But he was a cripple, and helpless; he had nothing to do but to die; after that it might be different. He would not be a cripple then; all his trouble would be over. Yes, the sooner he died the better.

With this feeling in his heart, it is little wonder that the cripple faded fast, and that the medicine which Sarah Holl insisted upon his taking had no salutary effect. With his adopted

parents 'he was always gentle and affectionate. He was as ready to help the children as formerly, as thoughtful and as unselfish, but the bright smile was gone; and Sarah Holl, as she looked up from her washing-tub at the quiet figure, with his work before him—but with his nimble fingers sometimes pausing awhile, while his thoughts were far away—would stop to wipe her eyes furtively with her checked apron. With a woman's discernment she had felt the reason of the change; the short cry, the ghastly pallor with which he had received the first news of Carry's flight; the wild outburst of passion; the subsequent quiet sadness, were enough for her. She knew then how he had worshipped Carry. She had communicated her thoughts to John, and had ordered the children never to allude to the subject of Carry's absence under pain of the severest punishment. And so the girl's name was never mentioned in the little house which her presence had so often brightened.

One thing only of notability had occurred, and this had been of so extraordinary a kind, that it had upset all Mrs. Holl's calculation of time. Mr. Barton had made his usual call, and had

evidently been struck with the great change which had taken place in James's appearance. He had not, however, spoken upon the subject, but had come again after only a month's interval, and had been palpably moved and excited at the sight of James's increasing weakness. He had even, when the others were talking, entered into a little private conversation with Mrs. Holl, and had inquired of her what was the cause of the illness of the cripple. Mrs. Holl had honestly told him that she did not know, and that the doctor, who had made two visits to the lad, had been unable to say what his ailment was. "Poor boy," she added, "I fear he will not be with us long."

Mr. Barton had been palpably affected, and had promised to call again soon to see how his young friend was getting on. What was really passing in his mind, was evident from his conversation with his wife upon his return home, after two or three subsequent visits to the Holls,—

"You have got away sooner than usual, Barton," that lady said, when he entered.

"Yes," he said. "No use stopping."

"Is the boy worse?" she asked anxiously.

"He is, Rachel. He is dying, there is no doubt about that. He may live a year or two; it all depends; but he is breaking up. Of course, the great question with us is, will he hold on till he is one-and-twenty? He wants nearly two years of it yet."

"One-and-twenty won't do, Barton," his wife said decidedly. "What is the use of getting a bond for ten thousand pounds from a boy who is going to die before he comes into his property? Who is going to pay it? After what has happened it is not likely his grandfather would pay a penny. The bond would not be worth the paper it's written on. No; if the boy is really dying, the whole game is up."

"Yes," her husband said, stroking his chin, "but I don't quite despair of making a good thing out of it yet. You see, the old man has two nephews, who, of course, if the boy is not heard of, are his natural heirs. One of these nephews he has, I find, quarrelled with, but what about I cannot discover; and I have tried every way I know. However, it is a regular split, and he is altogether out of it; so the other expects to step into the

old man's shoes. Now for the last three months, seeing that the boy is dying, I have had Benjamin at work, finding out about this other one. He is a hard-fisted, sharp young fellow, and he is said to be a 'cute hand at a bargain; and about as hard a chap to get over as you could want. A regular grinder. He has got some big works on down in the country, and his men hate him like poison. Benjamin says he don't know that he ever knew a young one so hated. Now I should think I might work him a bit. Just tell him the heir is alive, and that I can produce him. I don't know after all that it would not be as good as the old thing, and no fear of a blow up. What do you think, Rachel?"

"Well, it might do," his wife answered. "Don't you let him find out where the boy is, Barton, or he would wait till he died, and then snap his fingers at you."

"Thank you, Rachel; I am not quite a fool," her husband said grimly. "In a matter like this, which I have waited and planned for, for twenty years, I am not likely to make a mistake."

"And you have quite made up your mind,

Barton, that it will be better to try with the next heir ? ”

“Quite, Rachel ; I have thought it over in every light, and I don’t see that there is any chance now of getting anything out of this boy after all these years of watching.”

END OF VOL. II.

